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EVERY WEEK
FEBRUARY 18, 2026

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6 bedrooms | 3 bathrooms | 4 reception rooms | 2 bedroom bungalow | Groom's accommodation | Stabling | Indoor & outdoor school | Outbuildings
Landscaped gardens | Swimming pool | Tennis court | Paddocks | Pasture | Woodland | Approximately 19.41 acres | EPC E | Council Tax band H
Bishop's Waltham 1.5 miles | Winchester 10 miles (London Waterloo from 60 minutes) | Southampton 10 miles

Guide price £5,750,000

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020 7861 1080
edward.cunningham@knightframk.com

Knight Frank Winchester
01962 677234
george.clarendon@knightframk.com

Savills London
020 7016 3718
camilla.elwell@savills.com

MICHAEL GRAHAM

Bedford, Bedfordshire

Guide Price: £1,450,000

6 Bedrooms | **3** Reception Rooms | **3** Bathrooms | **C** EPC

A Victorian bay fronted town house in a conservation area of Bedford with views of the riverside Embankment. Built in the late 19th century, living space is spread over three floors, plus a cellar, and the semi-detached property has been sympathetically refurbished throughout to combine period character and contemporary charm.

Michael Graham Bedford
Jonathon Tolmie **01234 220000**

Michael Graham London
Richard Banks **020 8092 1888**

Knight Frank

REF: WBR012677333

ORFORD, SUFFOLK

The Great House is an elegant Grade II listed Georgian home with exceptional entertaining spaces and about 0.9 acres of landscaped gardens in the heart of Orford.

6 bedrooms | 6 bathrooms | 4 reception rooms | 1 bedroom annexe | Cellar | Terraces | Garden | Double garage | Herb garden | Orchard
EPC F | Freehold | Council Tax band G
Woodbridge 11 miles | Aldeburgh 11 miles | Ipswich 20 miles (London Liverpool Street from 65 minutes)

Guide price £2,600,000

Knight Frank Woodbridge
01394 334570
georgie.veale@knightframk.com

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01394 334571
james.harmer@knightframk.com

HISTORIC HOUSE IN IDYLLIC RURAL SETTING

7 4 5 | 15.4 acres

Hascombe, Surrey. Guide £5.5 million

A handsome Grade II listed house offering 5 fine reception rooms and 7 bedrooms served by 4 bathrooms, together with secondary accommodation featuring an open-plan kitchen, dining and living space and two bedroom suites. The landscaped gardens and grounds include a terrace, knot garden, formal rose garden, lake and pavilion, with stables, paddocks and a manège beyond. A quadruple garage, gym, two stores, stableyard, machinery barn, greenhouse and log store complete the amenities.

Freehold | Council Tax Band = H | EPC = F

Justin Theobald

Savills Country Department
01483 945 510
justin.theobald@savills.com

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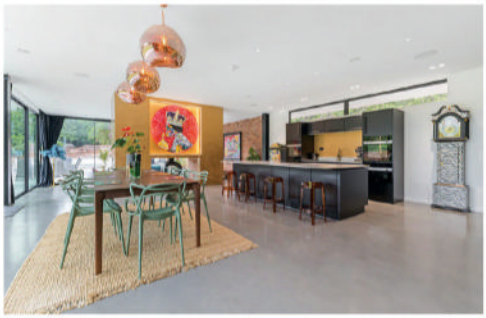

A magnificent luxury modern home with stunning bespoke design and styling, in a sought-after Surrey setting

Sunningdale: 3.5 miles (London Waterloo 52 mins), M3 (J3): 2.4 miles, Camberley: 4.8 miles,
Woking: 8.5 miles, London Heathrow Terminal 5: 10 miles, Central London: 35 miles
Reception hall | Sitting room | Cinema | Study | Kitchen/dining room | Utility | Cloakroom | Plant room | Games room | Principal bedroom with dressing room & ensuite bathroom | 4 Further bedrooms with ensuite bathrooms (one currently used as a gym) | Laundry room
Annexe with kitchen, bedroom & bathroom | Garage | Swimming pool | Half basketball court | Gardens | EPC Rating B

About 3.68 acres

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020 7591 2213
jordan.sturgess@struttandparker.com

Daniel Burstow
Ascot Office
01344 636 960
daniel.burstow@struttandparker.com

Oxfordshire, Marsh Gibbon

Set amid the tranquil beauty of Marsh Gibbon, The Charndon Estate is an exclusive gated collection of just twelve exceptional homes — each a testament to Oxfordshire's enduring rural character and timeless craftsmanship

Bicester: 7.7 miles, Aylesbury: 15.9 miles, Oxford: 23.1 miles

Blending historic architecture with contemporary refinement, the development has been thoughtfully conceived to honour its agricultural heritage while offering the very best of modern living. Every home is individual in character yet united by a shared commitment to quality — from exposed beams and natural stone walls, to open-plan living spaces, large windows that fill each room with light and original steels. The Agri-lux styling of the barns contrasts beautifully with the period charm of the farmhouse, creating a harmonious balance of heritage and sophistication.

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Guide Prices From £525,000 - £1,795,000

&

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National New Homes
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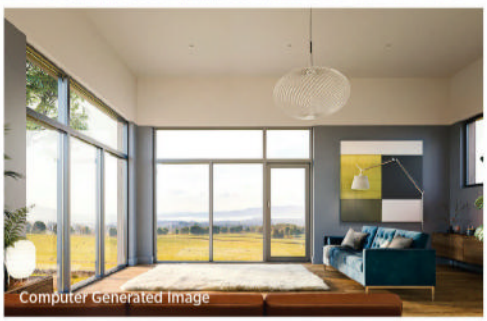
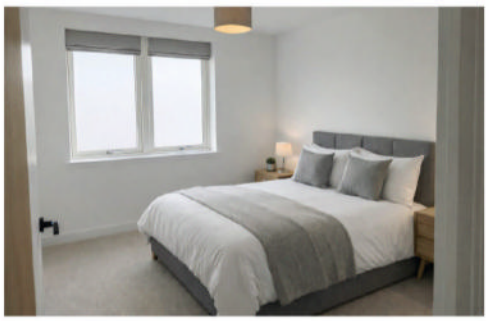
charlotte.moxon@struttandparker.com

James Brine
South East New Homes
01483 957 745
james.brine@struttandparker.com

Perth & Kinross, Athron Hill





Athron Hill is the eight remaining homes in the third and final phase within a popular and exclusive collection of exceptional five-bedroom detached homes

Milnathort: 8 miles, Perth: 19 miles, St Andrews: 30 miles, Edinburgh: 31 miles

Set within 150 acres of open countryside, designed to sit harmoniously within a stunning rural landscape while offering refined contemporary living. Elevated views stretch towards Loch Leven and the Cleish Hills, creating a peaceful sanctuary rich in wildlife yet well-connected for family life, leisure and work. Each home combines elegant modern design with natural, sustainable materials, including European larch cladding, high-performance glazing and energy-efficient construction. Interiors focus on light-filled open-plan living, bespoke contemporary kitchens, luxurious bathrooms and generous private outdoor space. Advanced technology, excellent thermal performance and thoughtful detailing enhance everyday comfort, while double garages, landscaped plots and optional additional land complete a truly distinctive rural offering.

LBTT contribution available

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Guide Prices Available From £740,000, £815,000 and £925,000

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david.law@struttandparker.com

Charlotte Moxon
National New Homes
07776 070 070
charlotte.moxon@struttandparker.com

Kent, Broadstairs

Coast and Country Living in Kent by award winning developer Elivia Homes, Kingsgate Place is an exclusive development with sea and golf views

Broadstairs station: 1.3 miles, Canterbury: 17 miles, Dover: 21 miles, Ashford: 35 miles
Built by award winning developer Elivia Homes, Kingsgate Place is an exclusive collection of 24 beautifully crafted homes, including 17 exceptional detached residences nestled in one of Broadstairs' most coveted areas. Each home is thoughtfully designed to offer generous living space, just moments from the town's scenic golf course and the iconic sandy shores that make Broadstairs so beloved. Whether you're seeking a peaceful retreat or a vibrant family base, Kingsgate Place presents a choice of three to six-bedroom homes tailored to modern lifestyles. It's an ideal setting for growing families, those looking to downsize in style, or professionals who value a serene home environment with seamless connections to key business centres.

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Guide Prices From £725,000

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Offers in excess of £3,000,000

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above

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signed and dated, lower left
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right

Philip Hutchins Rogers 1794–1853

A Scene at Millbrook Lake near Devonport, 1834

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Signed; titled and dated 05 on the stretcher
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Signed. Oil on canvas: 40 x 48 in
Painted in 1996. Price: **£48,000** + ARR

Venetian reflections

Signed. Oil on canvas: 40 x 48 in
Painted *circa* 1999. Price: **£42,000** + ARR

RIGHT:
Dora spring,

Signed. Oil on canvas: 48 x 40 in
Painted in 2001. Price: **£48,000** + ARR

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COUNTRY LIFE

VOL CCXXVI NO 8, FEBRUARY 18, 2026

Miss Liberty Adam

Liberty is a communications officer for the Alsama Project, an education non-profit organisation in Beirut, Lebanon. She volunteers on the ground with the Shatila refugee camp and is the daughter of the Reverend William and Sarah Adam of Canterbury, Kent.

Photographed at home in Canterbury, Kent, by Mike Topham

Contents February 18, 2026

Anadolu via Getty

Enter the dragon: China's remarkable biodiversity, heritage and design traditions provide the inspiration for the 30th Orchid Festival at Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew in Richmond, TW9. The event runs until March 8 in the Princess of Wales Conservatory (www.kew.org)

A mute swan (*Cygnus olor*) removes its own feathers (David Pattyn/naturepl.com)

COVER STORIES

48 A hub for living
Clive Aslet admires innovative Housestead, a modern home evoking the traditional buildings of its setting in rural Suffolk

56 The feather forecast
Charles Harris marvels at the miracle of plumage, a colourful accoutrement that provides protection and facilitates flight

64 Let's get ready to rumble
A 175-year-old Scottish firm is one of the unsung heroes of the Winter Olympics. Harry Pearson meets the curling-stone makers

72 The whole darn truth
Forget fast fashion—the art of 'make do and mend' is enjoying a comeback. Debora Robertson digs out her darning wool

THIS WEEK

44 Nadja Swarovski's favourite painting
The Really Wild owner chooses a work with an emotional link

46 Country-house treasure
John Goodall is shown a 17th-century Pythagoras portrait that found its way to West Wycombe Park in Buckinghamshire

54 The legacy
The pioneering approach of Eric Hosking transformed wildlife photography, finds Kate Green

68 Hats off
Deborah Nicholls-Lee lifts the lid on elegant hatboxes, often as worthy of our admiration as the millinery found within

74 Luxury
Amie Elizabeth White surveys the *Wuthering Heights* of fashion and celebrates February's birthstone

80 Interiors
Amelia Thorpe starts the count-down to London Design Week

92 Asymmetric thinking
Tiffany Daneff visits a new-build property in the Chilterns where the house and garden come together in perfect harmony

102 Travel
Kate Eshelby ponders the future of conservation as she comes face to face with the exotic inhabitants of Brazil's Pantanal

108 Arts & antiques
A new exhibition is marking 550 years since William Caxton brought the printing press to Britain. Carla Passino reports

112 The golden touch
A renewed appreciation of crafts-manship is kicking back against a world of mass production, as Corinne Julius discovers

118 Paradise revisited
Michael Billington welcomes the revival and reworking of plays by Stoppard, Strindberg and Coward

122 A rum deal
Henry Jeffreys proposes a toast to the Royal Navy's tot of rum

REGULARS

32 Town & Country
36 Notebook
38 Stuff & nonsense
40 Letters
41 Agromenes
42 Athena
88 Property news
90 Properties of the week
98 In the garden
100 Kitchen garden cook
116 Art market
120 Books
123 Bridge and crossword
125 Classified advertisements
130 Spectator
130 Tottering-by-Gently

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Fun and Games

THANK goodness for the Winter Olympics to cheer up the world. The exquisite skill and spectacle, the backdrop of the pink-hued Dolomites and the sheer madness of skiers twizzling through the air are proving an uplifting antidote to a drip-feed of news that seems to be interminably sad, sordid or soggy (there's even been rain in the Italian host city of Milan). A typically brilliant Matt cartoon in *The Daily Telegraph* summed it all up, a skeleton racer, poised on the lip of a terrifying slope, saying: 'Hurtling downwards, seconds from disaster, with no means of control. I'd hate to be Keir Starmer.'

The entrancing aspect of an Olympic Games is that one finds oneself engrossed, once every four years, in sports practised below the radar the rest of the time and that each has national specialists. China and the US may be prominent in Milan-Cortina 2026, but so are Latvia and Slovenia. Great Britain, whose plucky athletes have long been poor relations in the snow-and-ice stakes, are suddenly medal prospects once more. They're firing the imaginations of children happily occupied sliding down the bannisters and pushing saucepan lids across the kitchen floor with brooms (*'Let's get ready to rumble'*, *page 64*).

The television coverage is the BBC at its best, thanks to the polymathic Clare Balding and articulate, enthusiastic British Olympians, such as Robin Cousins and Lizzy Yarnold, providing knowledgeable commentary. This we need, as tiny movements or errors make the difference in sports where the margins between triumph and disaster are bewilderingly tight; the commentator for the women's luge enthused that Germany's champion Julia Taubitz had the 'luxury' of 7/10ths of a second in hand; the record-breaking US skier Lindsey Vonn reports that she was 'five inches too tight on her line' when she broke her leg.

Alongside the magical performances of the quad-flipping American skater Ilia Malinin, a Siegfried on ice, and the remarkable Italian speed skater Arianna Fontana clocking up her 12th medal, are the human stories of endeavour, four years of brutally hard graft culminating in ecstasy or devastation. The audience loved Lilah Fear and Lewis Gibson's rousing Scottish skating routine to *I'm Gonna Be (500 Miles)*, but a small slip blew medal hopes. There was a ski jumper born with curvature of the spine and, amazingly, one who suffered from vertigo; a Canadian skater, Piper Gilles, who had recovered from ovarian cancer, celebrated a first Olympic medal, bronze; American Maxim Naumov carries inside his leotard a photograph of his figure-skater parents, killed in a plane crash last year.

The Olympic movement is not immune to controversy or climate change, yet the original ideal of sport as a unifier and a rewarder of excellence is living on in the Italian mountains.

PPA Front Cover of the Year 2023

Property Magazine of the Year 2022, Property Press Awards

PPA Magazine Brand of the Year 2019

PPA Front Cover of the Year 2018

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British Society of Magazine Editors Scoop of the Year 2015/16

PPA Specialist Consumer Magazine of the Year 2014/15

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Julie Harding

Landmark case brought for ‘heritage protection’

NATIONAL TRUST redevelopment proposals for the Grade I-listed Palladian house Clandon Park in Surrey, which was left a charred shell by a ferocious fire in April 2015, will form the subject of a judicial review after permission was granted by the High Court last week. It comes after the Georgian Group launched proceedings against Guildford Borough Council, which gave planning and listed-building consents on November 11, 2025, to the Trust’s controversial proposals. The group is calling these consents ‘unlawful’ and is saying that they set ‘a dangerous precedent’ because they fundamentally undermine heritage protection for fire-damaged listed buildings.

> ‘The judicial review concerns an extremely important general principle’

‘We continue to believe that if the Clandon consents—predicated on the notion of a “post-fire significance”—are not quashed, this will set a dangerous precedent with far-reaching negative consequences for designated heritage assets,’ says the Georgian Group’s director, Dr Anya Lucas. ‘The judicial review… concerns an extremely important general principle, as well as an important listed building.’

The judicial review was granted on eight grounds, including that Guildford Borough Council adopted a ‘post-fire baseline’ for assessing significance (in other words, it was mistaken when determining that the assets and the scheme must be assessed against Clandon’s current state or when assessing the building’s significance), took a flawed and inconsistent approach to heritage benefits and impacts and that it failed to consider alternative schemes or the cumulative harm caused by the proposals. ‘We will defend our decision at a hearing,’ a council spokesperson told Country Life, as another for the Trust stated: ‘The National Trust remains committed to completing its proposed scheme, which will conserve the surviving building at Clandon and renew it as a welcoming, fully functional building for current and future generations.’

Leaving fire-damaged Clandon Park in Surrey unrestored could weaken protections for other listed buildings, with restoration no longer guaranteed after similar disasters

The plans for Clandon put forward by the Trust (the Trust itself isn’t a defendant in this case, but is an interested party) were drawn up by Allies and Morrison for the once exceptional house that was the most complete surviving work by architect Giacomo Leoni (about 1686–1746). Once approved by the council, they were referred to the Secretary of State, Steve Reed, who could have called for the application to be judged at an inquiry. He didn’t, so campaigning body Restore Trust applied for its own judicial review over his decision, but this was recently refused, with Cornelia Van der Poll telling Country Life: ‘An application as important and controversial as this should have been called in by the Secretary to be decided at a planning inquiry... Instead, the decision of a single hurried planning-committee meeting is allowed to stand, even though the committee members admitted to not having mastered the complex details of the application… We will continue fighting for Clandon.’

The National Trust’s plans would keep the interior largely in its fire-damaged state, which would, project director Kent Rawlinson said in 2022, enable visitors to see the ‘raw power and poetic beauty’ of the ravaged remains, facilitated by a series of walkways and stairs. The exterior, according to the Trust, which took ownership of the park in 1956, is undergoing conservation work and will look as it did pre-fire, although detractors claim that the new roof is unsympathetic and modern and a lift shaft towers over the old chimneys.

With the Georgian Group’s case designated as a Significant Planning Court Claim, it will be expedited through the system and could be heard as early as May by a specialist judge.

Researchers chart condition of *Mary Rose*

A NEW research project will investigate the condition of the hull of Henry VIII's flagship, *Mary Rose*. The ship, which was retrieved from the sea floor at Spithead in the Solent in 1982 and has since spent 44 years on dry land after 437 under water, will be assessed by two PhD students working with the universities of Southampton and Portsmouth. They will use state-of-the-art imaging techniques and organise the huge volumes of data amassed over the years by earlier researchers. 'The team believes this comprehensive record will help us to understand how the hull might change in the future,' says Sarah Coggins, conservation engineer at the Mary Rose Trust.

Research will ensure *Mary Rose* stays in good shape

Despite being 515 years old, *Mary Rose* is said by her team to be 'in a stable and well-preserved condition', thanks to the original 19-year programme of spraying with polyethylene glycol, followed by air-drying and, more recently, preventative conservation, such as environment monitoring. However, a potential future project involves opening up the never-before-seen starboard side to give visitors a new perspective on the ship. '[*Mary Rose*] still rests on the original steel cradle that was specially built to lift her from the seabed more than 40 years ago,' adds Ms Coggins. 'We'd like to explore modern technologies that could offer new ways of supporting the hull—structures that would not only preserve the ship, but also help to present her in the best possible way for future generations.'

Perches House, Shrewsbury, Shropshire, was gutted by fire in January and requires immediate attention

Funds needed after fire

A FUNDRAISER has been launched to secure £500,000 to repair the 14th-century, timber-frame, Grade II*-listed Perches House in Shrewsbury, Shropshire, that was badly damaged by a fierce fire in the early hours of January 17, its roof and original oak staircase destroyed. Rose Roberts, 81, who had been the guardian and restorer of the four-storey building for more than four decades, tragically lost her life in the fire and her daughter Jessica Richards's Shrewsbury Arts and Crafts shop within was smoke damaged. 'To me, the house is my mum. They are completely intertwined,' says Ms Richards, who is desperately hoping to save the house, the façade of which appeared in the 1984 film *A Christmas Carol*. 'Building Control has confirmed that it can be saved, but only with immediate and substantial intervention… About £100,000 is needed to stabilise and secure the structure... before any restoration work,' she writes on the Crowdfunder page (www.crowdfunder.co.uk/p/help-save-the-house-that-rose-re-built).

Wolverhampton to host historic double bill

Horses and greyhounds will converge on Wolverhampton Racecourse on March 7 in a UK first—the two have never shared the same fixture before. Horses will contest seven races first, including the track's biggest contest, the Lady Wulfruna Stakes, then, from 6.20pm, the inner greyhound track will become the centre of the action with 12 races (www.wolverhampton-racecourse.co.uk).

Good week for

Drawings
A study by Michelangelo of the right foot of the Libyan Sibyl on the Sistine Chapel ceiling took £16.9m at Christie's London. Sotheby's New York sold Rembrandt's drawing *Young Lion Resting* for £13.18m

Flemish sculptor fans
A temporary export bar has been placed on Rysbrack's sculpture of two putti supporting an architrave (about 1735–37), valued at £750,000

Vintage bear collectors
A rare 24in bear of about 1908, 'in good condition' and believed to be Steiff, will be offered by the Cotswold Auction Company on February 24 (estimate £300–£500)

Reintroductions
Restore is looking into whether the Dalmatian pelican (wingspan 8ft–12ft), extinct in Britain since medieval times, could be reintroduced and Cornwall Wildlife Trust has released two pairs of beavers into the Par and Fowey river catchments

Pro-dairy advocates
The Supreme Court has banned the makers of Oatly, a plant-based, dairy-free milk alternative, from using the term 'Post Milk Generation'

Bad week for

Hogwarts Express
The Jacobite Express, star of the 'Harry Potter' films, is strapped for cash; West Coast Railways says it is 'reviewing all options'

Agricultural families
New figures show that 47 people working in farming in England and Wales in 2024 lost their lives to suicide. The Farm Safety Foundation (Yellow Wellies) calls it the industry's 'biggest hidden problem'

Weather-weary locals
North Wyke in Devon, Cardinham in Cornwall and Astwood Bank in Worcestershire had all recorded 40 consecutive days of rain as COUNTRY LIFE went to press

A bird with heirs
Hen harrier Frank, who fathered numerous chicks over seven years across grouse moors in the Yorkshire Dales, has died of avian flu

Green light for station scheme sparks fury

THIS is a sad day for the City of London,' said Griff Rhys Jones, president of the Victorian Society and of the Liverpool Street Station Campaign (LISSCA), following last week's announcement that the planning committee of the City of London had given the go ahead for Acme's £1.2 billion redevelopment plans for the capital's Liverpool Street Station. City councillors green lit the controversial scheme by 19 votes to three, despite a record 3,500 objections. 'A disfiguring billion-pound office block on top of a major heritage asset is not essential to the City's development plans,' added Mr Rhys Jones. 'It is doubtful whether it will easily provide the profit to "improve" the concourse... it demolishes listed buildings. It is harmful to the surrounding historic fabric.'

Although there was support for the scheme—from 1,152 members of the public—campaigners have vowed to fight on for a sympathetic rejuvenation of the central London terminus, with SAVE Britain's Heritage stating: 'What a missed opportunity to consider less disruptive and damaging approaches to funding the station upgrades that passengers deserve. We will be carefully examining the committee's decision and will consider our next steps.'

Ellie Burrows, managing director for Network Rail's Eastern region, said: 'Our plans focus on improving the everyday experience for passengers... [We] respect the station's unique heritage. With annual passenger numbers forecast to grow to 158 million, this approval ensures that the station will be future-proofed for decades to come.'

A marketing image from Network Rail's proposal to 'future-proof' Liverpool Street Station in London

London's concrete Southbank Centre, which is made up of the Hayward Gallery, the Purcell Room and the Queen Elizabeth Hall, as well as a skatepark, has been granted Grade II-listed status. Six proposals to list the complex, frequently dubbed 'Britain's ugliest building', were put forward over 35 years only to face constant rejection. 'The battle has been won and brutalism has finally come of age,' says Catherine Croft, Twentieth Century Society director, which has long campaigned for the centre to be listed.

Carlisle's East Window tops Divine Light poll

THE East Window at Carlisle Cathedral in Cumbria has been named the Nation's Favourite Stained Glass Window in the Association of English Cathedrals' Divine Light competition, thanks in part to a social-media campaign that saw a window from each of England's 45 cathedrals shared between Advent and January 14. Thousands of votes were cast for the top 12 that were shortlisted from social media 'likes', with Carlisle's East Window coming out on top of York Minster's Great East Window, St Albans Cathedral's Rose Window in Hertfordshire, Wells Cathedral's Jesse Window in Somerset and Gloucester Cathedral's Great East Window. 'The combination of the ancient glass at the top and the wonderful Victorian depictions of Jesus's life, all set beneath our starry ceiling, means that you truly get a glimpse of Heaven inside the cathedral,' says the Venerable Michael Everitt, interim Dean of Carlisle.

Glorious: Carlisle Cathedral's East Window beat 45 other windows

Alamy; Mr. Cyril Baldwin / Historic England Archive; The Cotswold Auction Company; Shutterstock; Network Rail; Will Pryce/Country Life Picture Library

The moor the merrier

Black grouse are thriving on Viscount Ridley's Co Durham moor, winning the estate Gold at the Purdey Awards

AN ambitious project to boost numbers of black grouse on a grouse moor in Co Durham claimed gold at the Purdey Awards for Game & Conservation last week. Held in James Purdey & Sons' historic Long Room in London's Mayfair, W1, the ceremony saw Viscount Ridley and his gamekeeping team hailed for their 'extraordinary' efforts in regenerating the moor edge at East Carnigill, near Baldersdale, for the benefit of waders, grey partridges and black grouse. This has led to a dramatic increase in lekking males—from 47 in 2019 to 109 in 2024. Praised by the chair of the judges, the Duke of Wellington, as a 'five-star haven for wildlife and sport', the estate was commended for its Let's Learn Moor education project, which has helped to win Westminster grouse-moor management debates. 'I'm very grateful to Purdey, but my biggest thanks goes to our keepers, who are just as keen as I am to see the black grouse flourish,' noted an elated Lord Ridley. 'We live and breathe what we do,' added his 'overwhelmed' head keeper, Mark Gallagher, who accepted the award with beatkeeper Will Makepeace and land agent Will Todd.

The habitat creation at two shoots in Cambridgeshire—Park Farm Shoot in Thorney (silver) and Kingston Wood, Royston (bronze)—was lauded, with highly commended going to the regenerative Necton Farm in Norfolk. *PM*

A new exhibition will celebrate the 14th-century art of Longthorpe Tower

Painted tower project goes public

THE conservation of the exceptional medieval wall paintings at Longthorpe Tower in Peterborough is the subject of a new exhibition at Courtauld Gallery's Project Space, London WC2. Commissioned in the 1330s by Robert Thorpe, who owned the manor house, and rediscovered in the 1940s, the paintings feature a wide range of subjects, from royal, religious and mythical figures to birds and animals. However, 700 years have taken their toll and the joint conservation project between English Heritage and the Courtauld's Conservation Department, as well as early influences on the artists and the creation of the wall paintings, will all be covered in 'The Painted Tower: Conservation in Context at Longthorpe', which runs from February 26–May 27 (www.courtauld.ac.uk/whats-on).

Country Mouse

Raining catkins and dogs

THE fact that, at the time of writing, it has rained every day since the start of 2026 is not lost on any of us. Personally, I've never minded a bit of rain—I've always thought that, provided you've got a decent coat and a hat on, there's something gently soothing about light drizzle. The number of typically understated terms for precipitation that we use (such as spitting, mizzle and shower) also make me smile. Nonetheless, the incessant bouts of heavy, lashing and pelting rain have even begun to make me a little miserable. My labradors, too, are currently less than enthusiastic about a trot along the sodden Somerset lanes that leaves them splattered with mud and necessitates (sorry, boys) another cold deluge under the hosepipe before the indignity of having to wait on the doormat, as I try to dry their feet and dripping-wet tails before they inevitably shake, spraying the kitchen with myriad grimy droplets.

Yet, the mighty power of the natural world continues to astound me. A scattering of violet crocuses now complements the drifts of indefatigable snowdrops on one of our walks and a proliferation of graceful, golden male catkins is happily swinging from the hazel trees in the hedgerows—a sure sign that spring is slowly, but surely, on its way. **PM**

Town Mouse

The London return

THIS week we had an 80th birthday to celebrate in the family and there was a gathering of generations in the distinctly rural setting of Strangford Lough, Northern Ireland. Its rolling drumlins make for an extraordinarily beautiful landscape and one, moreover, that is continuously animated by the changing mood of the weather and the movement of the tides. It rained for much of the weekend, but, happily, no one paid attention. Some members of the party rented out a mobile sauna, cheerfully navigating a sea of mud between the baking cabin and cool waters of the lough. Others got wet in a more conventional manner by going for a walk. En route, we encountered a pair of signs unthinkingly hung one above the other on the same telegraph pole. One threatened 'danger of death' with the printed image of a man being struck down, as the other re-assured readers in bold, painted strokes that 'Jesus saves'.

Returning to the familiar bustle of the English capital after happy events of this kind is always slightly disorientating. Perhaps that explains why, arriving on the platform at London City Airport station as the door alarms of a train sounded, I instinctively leapt on board. The sense of triumph evaporated as it became apparent that the train was going the wrong way. **JG**

Town & Country Notebook

Edited by Agnes Stamp

Quiz of the week

1) Do coffee bushes (*Coffea*) produce nuts or fruits?
2) In which sport would you use the terms 'house', 'hammer', 'stones' and 'brooms'?
3) Name the famous rock formation found at the western tip of the Isle of Wight
4) During the Second World War, how long did the Blitz last?
5) Name the last king to be born in Scotland

Riddle me this

What disappears as soon as you say its name?

100 years ago in COUNTRY LIFE February 20, 1926

FISHING traditions have grouped the fish of our lakes and rivers under two main headings—sporting fish and coarse fish. The salmon and the common brown trout are included among the former. Coarse fish mainly consist of members of the carp family—cyprinoids. Of these the most frequently met are the carp itself, the roach, the rudd and the dace, the bream of our broads and the chub of our streams. Of predatory fish we have the pike, the perch and the pestilential eel. Carp are susceptible to vibrations of the water and, in a pond, will never allow a boat or punt to approach. I recall one case where several attempts had been made to approach some inaccessible fish, and how they were outwitted by a farmhand who threaded his fine gut through a leaf, which, acting as a sail and a float, carried a wriggling worm to the unsuspecting carp.

1) Fruits 2) Curling 3) The Needles 4) Eight months 5) Charles I. Riddle me this: Silence

S.O.S.

Sealyham terrier

IF the Sealyham terrier were a breed of farm animal rather than a pedigree terrier, it would by now feature on the most urgent list of the Rare Breeds Survival Trust and be placed as a "Category 1: critical" breed,' COUNTRY LIFE bewailed in 1985. By 2011, numbers were so low that the magazine launched a 'Save Our Sealyhams' campaign. Engineered in the mid 19th century by fieldsportsman Capt John Owen Tucker-Edwardes (1808–91), the breed developed 'a harsh, weather-resisting coat, a broad, strong jaw, short legs, powerful body and a courageous temperament—a dog that would go to ground and tackle anything from a rat to a badger or fox'. Their popularity peaked in the 1920s and 1930s and the tenacious little dogs would eventually go on to charm royalty. The Queen Mother was fond of them, and Princess Margaret had two, named Johnnie and Pippin. In 1959, the *Sunday Express* reported: 'A notice has been posted in Clarence House and Windsor Castle giving explicit instructions that when Princess Margaret has breakfast in bed, her two Sealyhams must be brought to the room along with her breakfast tray.'

From 'Country Life's Book of Dogs' (Rizzoli, £50)

Time to buy

Dark brown driving loafers: soft supple suede with a rubber sole, made in Italy, £720, Connolly (020–7952 6708; www.connollyengland.com)

Toleware letter holder in chilli red and teal: painted and lacquered sheet metal with a scalloped edge detail, £75, Sarah K (01672 216767; www.sarahk.co.uk)

On this day... February 18, 1981

Breaking a 152-year-old tradition, Oxford University announces that Sue Brown, a 22-year-old biochemistry student at Wadham College, will become the first female cox in the history of the University Boat Race. Fresh from representing Great Britain in the women's coxed four at the 1980 Moscow Olympics (the team finished sixth), she would go on to steer the Oxford VIII to an eight-length victory over Cambridge.

A novel note

'Regrets and apologies are all very well, but there's things that happen in a person's life that are so scorched in the memory and burned into the heart that there's no forgetting them. They're like brands'

***Mutiny on the Bounty,* John Boyne**

Poet's corner

'Willows whiten, aspens quiver,
Little breezes dusk and shiver'

***The Lady of Shalott,* Alfred, Lord Tennyson**

Robert Race; Alamy; Country Life Picture Library/Future PLC

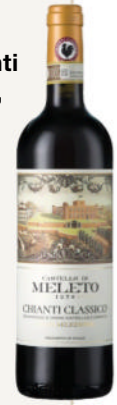
The taste of Britain
Shropshire: Fidget pie

THE 1954 Ideal Home Exhibition at Olympia, London W14, was entirely dedicated to the new 'Labour-Saving Life'—well, almost. Among displays of food-mixers and an 'automatic drying cabinet' for laundry was the Women's Institute 'County Fare' stand, showcasing decidedly labour-intensive historic foods from around the country. Flying the flag for Shropshire was a layered and intriguingly named shortcrust pie. According to Florence White's 1932 regional recipe collection *Good Things in England*, fidget (or 'fitchett') pie 'was used a great deal in old farmhouses as a supper dish for harvesters', which might explain why it contains apples, as well as potatoes, bacon, pork or mutton. Although lesser-spotted it never entirely faded from view: in October 1964, the *Daily Mail*'s Margaret Alden offered her readers a recipe, describing it as a 'cut-and-come-again meat pie' that was 'a useful dish for high tea or supper time', and it appears in Jane Grigson's 1971 *Good Things*. In 2015, Yotam Ottolenghi used his *Guardian* column to praise its 'simple and timeless combination' of flavours. *EH*

Illustration by Kateryna Kyslitska

Wine o'clock

Black cherry



Castello di Meleto, Chianti Classico Gran Selezione, Tuscany, Italy, 2020. £32.15–£40 Lekker Wines, Museum Wines, The Fine Wine Co, Vinvm, alc 14%

Fruit for the Gran Selezione is sorted twice, with the wine exhibiting striking black cherry, ripe red berries and lifted notes of lavender and rosemary. The palate marries power with refinement, firm yet silken tannins and a spice-tinged finish of length and harmony.

Visit www.decanter.com

Time for tea

Nilgiri (*neel-ghee-ree*)

Nilgiri means blue hills, a name given by early travellers to southern India who saw the slopes veiled in a cool, blue haze. The colour came later from the vast stands of *Eucalyptus globulus*, blue gum trees, introduced from Australia in the 1840s. British planters established the first Nilgiri tea gardens in the mid 19th century, bringing cuttings from China and Assam to experiment at altitude. Today, these gardens produce teas known for balance and brightness, lighter than Assam, less floral than Darjeeling, but with an alpine freshness all their own. Nilgiri glows amber in the cup, smooth and clear, with notes of orchid and honey.

How to serve

Allow one teaspoon of loose-leaf tea per cup and steep in freshly boiled water (about 95°C) for three minutes. Best without milk.

Where to buy

The Kent & Sussex Tea & Coffee Company sells 125g of fine Nilgiri for £5.37 (01233 840265; www.tea-and-coffee.com)

Jonathon Jones tastes tea and exports English-grown tea worldwide

Unmissable events

February 25–March 8 Glasgow Film Festival, various venues, Lanarkshire. Celebrating new talent alongside some of the world's finest film-makers, Scotland's flagship film event transforms the 'Dear Green Place' into a city-wide celebration of cinema (www.glasgowfilmfest.org)

March 3 Willow-weaving workshop, Hutton Wandesley Stables, York, North Yorkshire. Learn how to fashion a garden trug from willow cane and enjoy a delicious seasonal lunch with produce from the Walled Garden (01904 738755; www.huttonwandesleystables.co.uk)

Until March 8 'A Moveable Refreshment: Works Old and New by Robert Race' (*pictured*), Museum in the Park, Stroud, Gloucestershire. Combining humour, fascination and a delight in discarded objects, this exhibition showcases the creations of an award-winning toymaker and inventor whose work spans 30 years (01453 763394; www.museuminthepark.org.uk)

March 19–August 16, 'In Bloom: How Plants Changed Our World', Ashmolean Museum, Oxford, Oxfordshire. Exploring our relationship with the natural world, this exhibition of more than 100 artworks and objects reveals how plants continue to shape our landscapes and lifestyles today (01865 278000; www.ashmolean.org)

Until November 15 'Glowing + Alive', Chichester Cathedral, West Sussex. A new exhibition explores the story behind one of Britain's most daring post-war art commissions—artist and printmaker John Piper's vivid tapestry that occupies the whole area behind Chichester Cathedral's High Altar (www.chichestercathedral.org.uk)

Stuff & nonsense

Will Hosie

And, pray tell, what do you think of *Wuthering Heights*?

I WONDER what Dominic Sandbrook made of all the romping in *Wuthering Heights*. I watched Emerald Fennell's new film last Friday, as did hundreds of thousands of others, having discussed the novel on which it's based with Britain's favourite historian two weeks earlier. 'I've been poring over the book's Victorian reviews,' Dr Sandbrook says, 'which described it as over the top and melodramatic.' At the time, his only exposure to Ms Fennell's *Wuthering Heights* had been via its trailer—which he says was enough to suggest a 'shocking' and 'exploitative' film.

Dr Sandbrook is best known as the co-host of *The Rest Is History*, a podcast that was launched during the pandemic and consistently ranks among Britain's most popular. The show's producer, Tabitha Syrett, now joins the historian before the microphone on their new programme, *The Book Club*, produced by the *über*-talented Nicole Maslen, whose credits include *The Rest Is Politics* and Bella Freud's *Fashion Neurosis*. The inaugural episode, out yesterday, focuses on *Wuthering Heights*, with upcoming instalments on *The Secret History*, *East of Eden* and (naturally) *Hamnet*.

Listening for the literate: Dominic Sandbrook and Tabitha Syrett's new podcast, *The Book Club*, opens with Emily Brontë

'*Wuthering Heights* captures people's imagination in different ways,' notes Ms Syrett, who went through a phase of reading the novel at least once every year. Ms Fennell, who read it for the first time aged 14, based the latest adaptation on her teenage self's interpretation of the text: yearning, glamorous and sexually inquisitive. The film's reviews have been mixed. 'There is no person or inanimate object safe in a film where Fennell's main directorial note to [Jacob] Elordi seems to have been, "Great, but can you also lick it?"', wrote Kevin Maher in *The Times*. Defendants, however, have pointed to the initial reception of Brontë's own novel and how that was little better. 'Shocking' and 'exploitative', indeed.

Ms Syrett, however, offers a more nuanced view. 'I don't think Brontë was trying to ruffle feathers,' she says, 'more that she was trying to do something retro and harking back to an earlier style.' 'The novel is very Gothic,' concurs Dr Sandbrook, 'all howling gales and claustrophobic interiors.' Ms Fennell's production designer, Suzie Davies, designed the walls on set to resemble skin and human-hand moulds. At least they got that bit right.

The Book Club captures a conversation that's far greater than *Wuthering Heights* (the film is merely a starting point). The Government has named 2026 the National Year of Reading, campaigning to quell illiteracy and get people—notably children—off their phones. 'The late John Carey believed that literature was the greatest art form,' Dr Sandbrook says, 'because it stimulates our imagination rather than forcing another's vision onto us. Tabby's Heathcliff, for example, is never going to be the same as my Heathcliff.' 'Indeed,' Ms Syrett agrees. 'Mine bears a remarkable resemblance to Jacob Elordi.'

Knock on wood

George Barham started woodcarving when he was about eight years old. 'It was only a hobby,' he says, 'but it's now grown into a part-time business.' Now in his early thirties, he returned to his farm in Kent after an overseas deployment with the army where he was a captain in the Royal Yeomanry, and found he had 'lots of spare time, so produced an oak replica of my dad's family home for his 60th birthday, which now sits in our hallway. Every time we have guests around for lunch, they make a point of asking where to order something similar and my portfolio basically grew from there.'

Mr Barham's architectural woodcarvings (www.georgebarham.co.uk) cost about £2,500 apiece—more if the building he's replicating is complex or has a dome. He first conceived of his work as purely ornamental, but found the products could be used 'as boxes or pencil cases', too. 'The carving of Chevening House in Kent (*right*) is my favourite,' he says. You might see his work at the Historic Houses trade fair before you know it.

What you might have *missed*

I found out last week that French trains are to create child-free carriages—news that was greeted with glee at Country Life HQ. It doesn't matter that, in the same week, the French government announced that it would be writing to its 29 year olds encouraging them to have children now, lest the replacement rate fall below 2.01. After all, what is France without its philosophical contradictions? It got me thinking, more importantly, about who else ought to be removed

from SNCF's Optimum Plus package, or the equivalent thereof on British rail: consumers of smelly food, snorers, gum chewers, teenagers and those who don't believe in headphones or listen to music so loudly that you can hear the lyrics through them anyway. Train etiquette: underrated.

Alamy

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adamarchitecture.com

Letters to the Editor

Mark Hedges

Letter of the week

Back to the future

EMMA HUGHES correctly sums up the key problem with AI (*'Artificial sweeteners'*, *January 14*), which neither politicians, companies or citizens are facing—'the silent theft of our species' most precious gift: our ability to think'. Unless, as a matter of urgency, we institute an AI literacy campaign, which must include reminding users that this is simply a prediction machine, we will be lost to the hype rather than taking part in the debate we must have about what AI can do for humans, rather than what humans can do for the machine.
Kay Firth-Butterfield, US

The writer of the letter of the week will win a bottle of Pol Roger Brut Réserve Champagne

Annual leaf

I WAS delighted to read about the Chinese Keemun black tea (*Town & Country Notebook*, *January 28*). I discovered its delights many years ago when my mother popped a packet in my stocking one Christmas. I had never heard of this variety and, fearing it might be similar to Lapsang due to its smoky, tarry flavour, I mixed it with a packet of Earl Grey and one of Assam, which I had previously been blending. The result was a happy accident and produced one of the nicest, freshest cups of tea I had ever had the pleasure of drinking.
Bryony Hill, West Sussex

Wall done

I FULLY support the suggestion in your January 28 Leader (*'In search of the obscure'*) that dry-stone walling could be recognised as UNESCO Living Heritage. We moved to the Cotswolds 14 years ago to a 13-acre property surrounded by dry-stone walls. My first Christmas present from my wife was a dry-stone walling course: I learned the basics and, with one notable exception, have successfully repaired a number of sections tumbled as a result of weather and

foxes' and badgers' runs. I have found the practice both satisfying and therapeutic: I have composed many a difficult email while sorting the stones.
John Dennis, Gloucestershire

Horns of plenty

AS a past breeder of cattle, including a small fold of Highlanders, I very much enjoyed Patrick Laurie's article on a modern drove (*'For I'll be a wild drover'*, *January 21*). The original and ultimate destination would have been the Dingwall Market, Inverness-shire, where stands a life-size bronze of a droving bull, drover and his collie (*above*). I was commissioned to create the sculpture; the directors of the market felt that, as a breeder of cattle, I should know what a good bull looks like!
Lucy Poett, Clackmannanshire

Travel back in time

READERS inspired to holiday in the UK by your Leader (*'Home is where the holiday is'*, *February 4*) should pack a pre-Second World War edition of the Signpost travel guide created by W. G. McMinnies, the notable aviator and motorist. Vintage copies are available online, and the 1935–39 volumes in particular are compelling windows on a golden age of travel. McMinnies drove 1,000 miles a week and his reviews describe fascinating proprietors and eye-catching landscapes. Each entry also has a photograph and a tariff: in 1936, for example, a week at a hotel on the 'tripper free' north Cornwall coast cost only 8½ guineas—or about £9 in new money.
Kevin Duffy, Manchester

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Getty; Alamy; John Holder

Whisky business

YOUR mention of haggis in India (*Town & Country Notebook*, *January 28*) brought back happy memories of a Burns Night ball on Malabar Hill in 1972. My mother-in-law, very prim and proper outwardly, was spending a few weeks' holiday with us and attended. After many toasts to the haggis, kilted dancers twirled her around until they all collapsed into a heap on the dance-floor. Thereafter, whisky was renamed 'haggis gravy' in our family.

Peter J. Pepper, *Devon*

Keeping it in the family

MY mother, Judith, was an avid COUNTRY LIFE reader, so I bought her a subscription some years ago. Every week, she told me it was the best present she'd ever received. The past tense is now, sadly, upon us, but I was fortunate to spend precious time with her before she passed away. We shared a love of unusual words, so your January 21 edition immediately brought Mum back to me—she would have rung to make me guess the meanings of psithuras and soughing from Alan Titchmarsh's In the garden column. I'll be keeping up the family tradition: the subscription has now been redirected to me.

Johanna Headley, *by email*

COUNTRY LIFE
FEBRUARY 25

Calling all Fentons: the search begins again for Britain's naughtiest dog. Plus fermenting, symbiosis in the animal kingdom, royal astronomy and darling daphnes

When advertising is nuts

THE Tube is always an eye-opener when visiting London from the country. Passengers are faced with a full-frontal array of posters all designed to catch their attention by immediate impact. They are so much part of the scenery for most Londoners that they're simply accepted, but the novelty for those of us travelling from rural England often makes us inspect them more closely.

That is why Agromenes was captured and instantly annoyed by a current advertisement on the Underground saying 'Great for Greta' and illustrating this with three little food balls labelled 'ham and cheese croquettes'. In fact, they contain neither ham nor cheese. This is a vegan product, 100% plant based and contrived to taste something like the meat and dairy products that our farmers produce. Does the vegan believer not ask: 'Why, under the intentions of the Trade Descriptions Act, should we be allowed to call a product what it isn't?' Why don't they also ask: 'If it's wrong to eat animal-derived food, isn't it even worse to eat a hypocritically labelled product that pretends to be precisely the food we condemn?'

> 'The croquettes contain neither ham nor cheese. This is a vegan product, 100% plant based'

Happily for Agromenes, right next door to Greta was a huge picture of a squirrel grasping a pot of Pip & Nut peanut butter. We countrymen don't have the urban affection for the grey squirrel, not least because of our experience of their devastation of our home-produced nuts. However, this reminder of the natural world in such an unnatural setting is cheering and properly reflects the attitude of the business. The pack is entirely recyclable, tells you precisely what is in it, where it comes from and that it is utterly plant based—no hypocrisy, no pretence.

Agromenes's cheer didn't last. Still waiting for a train, he was faced with two huge posters, one discourteous and another that should be banned. The first was the product of a company that wants us to drink its 'alcohol-free' lager. To arrest our attention, it uses religious references, currently a picture of someone who looks like a nun and is headed with the word SALVATION. It is the latest in a continuous series of posters, all based on cheap references to Christian belief or practice. Indeed, the product seems to have no reality apart from this positioning.

Yet neither the advertising agency nor the management would dare to be so cavalier about any other religion. Can one imagine a similar poster with a woman in a hijab, making a cheap reference to the Koran? Transport for London allows fun to be made of Christians that they would never allow if the jibes concerned a different creed. Apart from this obvious bias, the concept of courtesy has been lost and that disfigures the Tube, which serves people of all and no religion. It relies upon the fact that Christians have been browbeaten into not complaining lest they look old-fashioned or exclusive. It's time to call time on discourtesy.

At least there's nothing wrong in principle in advertising low-alcohol lager, however. Another poster flaunts a free offer for a range of flavoured nicotine pouches as an alternative to smoking or vaping. Of course it carries a health warning, but that doesn't excuse pushing yet another means of addiction to nicotine. Advertising such products should be illegal in the same way as for cigarettes. The creativity and verve of posters in the London Underground is still a special feature of a visit to town, but now, until my train comes, I'm going back to the squirrel.

Athena
Cultural Crusader

Problems on an industrial scale

LAST year, Stoke-on-Trent, Staffordshire, celebrated its centenary as a city. The original prosperity of this federation of six towns rested on its world-famous potteries and the output of such celebrated companies as Spode, Wedgwood and Minton. With the decline of ceramics production over the past 50 years or so, however—and despite the vigorous continuing tradition of smaller-scale manufacture in Stoke—its fortunes have sharply declined. With that change has come the wholesale neglect of many buildings that were created by its industry and that define it in an architectural sense. Happily, the council is now trying to confront this problem.

A 'prospectus' on the city's heritage titled *A National Heritage Emergency* has just been published. This not only characterises and quantifies the issues faced by the neglected heritage of Stoke, but seeks to encourage investment in it as well. It estimates, for example, that there is the capacity for up to 1,000 new homes in the city's derelict properties. The prospectus also describes some of the city's recent restoration successes and identifies 17 important buildings, a park and numerous remaining bottle kilns in urgent need of investment. To save these things, it estimates the need to raise £325 million from both private and public sources over the next five to 10 years.

> 'There is capacity for up to 1,000 new homes in the city's derelict properties'

As context for the challenge faced by Stoke, readers can turn to a sobering report published in recent weeks by the Department for Culture, Media and Sport. *England's Cultural Infrastructure: Repair, Maintenance and Renewal* was commissioned nearly three years ago to assess the scale of the backlog of repair, maintenance and renewal in cultural assets across England in the aftermath of the pandemic. Researched by Purcell, it is focused on publicly owned and publicly accessible cultural venues including theatres, performing-arts centres, cathedrals and churches (in their role as visitor destinations), non-accredited museums and historic houses and monuments where publicly accessible. Nearly 70% of the buildings surveyed have 'needs beyond routine repair and maintenance', with churches reported as being in the worst condition overall.

The report estimates the total value of necessary works at about £7 billion, of which about £3 billion are urgent and need completion within the next five years. At present, it calculates a funding deficit for this latter work of about £2 billion and suggests the extension of the Listed Places of Worship Grant Scheme to relieve the costs of VAT more widely. Of course, in the past month, the Government has promised only £1.5 billion funding over the next five years—which Athena would suggest is less generous than it sounds (*January 28*)—and cancelled this scheme. As a final and depressing touch, the report identifies failing roofs as the most common problem with the buildings in its scope. Unhappily, it's a point that the exceptionally wet start to the year will have highlighted and worsened.

The way we were Photographs from the COUNTRY LIFE archive

1958 Published March 6

Deed boxes piled up in the warehouse of C. Hoare & Co's Bank, Fleet Street, EC4. Despite the impression of picturesque chaos, each chest is marked in chalk and carefully labelled and dated. They are also arranged in alphabetical order. The earliest ledger of the bank dates to 1673.

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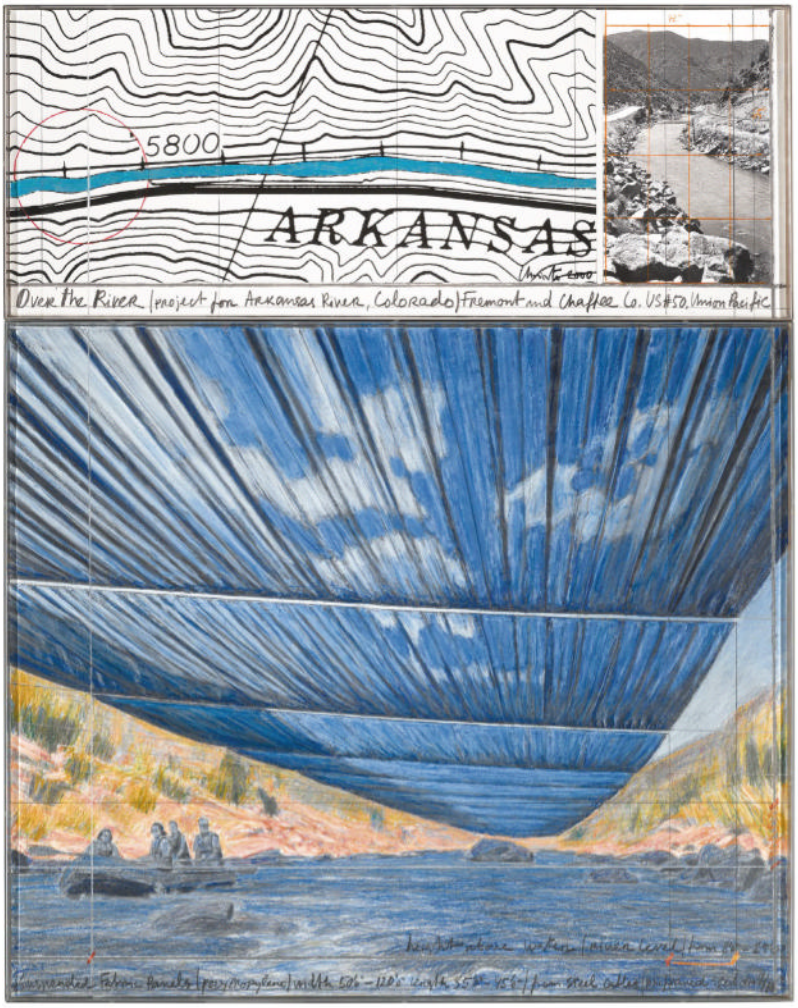
My favourite painting Nadja Swarovski

Over the River (project for the Arkansas River, State of Colorado) by Christo



***Over the River (project for the Arkansas River, State of Colorado)*, 1992–2017, pastel, wax crayon, paper tape, pencil, charcoal, topographic map and photograph on paper, 26¾in by 30¾in, by Christo (1935–2020) and Jeanne–Claude (1935–2009), private collection**

Nadja Swarovski is the owner and chief creative officer of luxury clothing brand Really Wild

'In 1992, I took a trip white-water rafting down the Arkansas River in Colorado, US, and have felt a strong emotional connection to it ever since. There had been a lot of snowfall that year, which had melted into the river, resulting in Level 5 rapids. We'd been warned about the dangers, but thought we could handle them, until my boyfriend at the time was knocked out of the boat and was sucked into an underwater swirl. We were all terrified, but instinct took over and we managed to pull his unconscious body out a few miles downstream. It took several minutes of CPR before he started to breathe again. This was one of those moments when one learns so much about oneself and, for me, it was about inner strength and staying focused on the task at hand–something that has helped me enormously as a parent, in my private life and in my career'

Charlotte Mullins comments on *Over the River (project for the Arkansas River, State of Colorado)*

THE work *Over the River* by Christo and his wife and partner, Jeanne-Claude, exists today as a series of pencil and charcoal sketches and photographic collages. An aerial view shows four geometric fabric panels suspended on poles above the water and energetic charcoal drawings capture the pair's vision to transform the river into a submerged, shaded space. These working drawings were for a vast, ambitious project, a site-specific installation that would temporarily turn the Arkansas River in Colorado into a gleaming, rippling, living artwork. They envisioned six miles of silver nylon panels suspended 10ft above the water, from bank to bank, with multiple sections creating fabric tunnels that rafters would enter and exit as they followed the river downstream.

They first dreamed up the idea to 'wrap' a river in 1992. For three summers, they navigated the waterways of America until they homed in on the Arkansas River in Colorado. They had been wrapping objects, store fronts, bridges and buildings since the 1960s—as they selected the Arkansas, they were finalising the temporary wrapping of the entire Reichstag in Germany. They had installed miles of brightly coloured fabric across Californian hillsides and Australian coastlines and knew how to apply successfully for state and national permits to enable their ambitious wrappings to go ahead. In this instance, however, a local group mobilised to thwart the project and, after five years of battling in court, Christo, by now widowed, reluctantly abandoned *Over the River*.

Christo and Jeanne-Claude Foundation

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‘What were his reasons for buying it? Was it chance or did he feel drawn to it?’

West Wycombe Park, Buckinghamshire

A holiday purchase

SIR EDWARD DASHWOOD stands by a portrait of Ancient Greek philosopher Pythagoras by José de Ribera. Born in Valencia, Spain, in 1591, Ribera spent his adult life in Italy, where he became known as 'the Little Spaniard' or Lo Spagnoletto. His documented career began in Parma, but he moved from there to Rome and finally Naples, where he remained until his death in 1652. The city was then under Spanish rule and his paintings were collected by several viceroys, who, in turn, supplied them in quantity to the royal collection of Philip IV.

Ribera's work was in striking contrast to that of his Spanish contemporaries and included unfamiliar genres, such as a series of portraits of ancient philosophers, to which this belongs. His paintings with their dramatic lighting were greatly admired by British Grand Tourists in the 18th century, notably the remarkable Sir Francis Dashwood, creator of the present house and park at West Wycombe. 'I love the idea that my infamous ancestor purchased this painting,' says Sir Edward, 'probably in Rome on one of his visits. It has been at West Wycombe Park ever since. What were his reasons for buying it? Was it chance or did he feel drawn to it? I find it a fascinating painting. It is not only a wonderful portrait study, but depicts such a significant figure.' *JG*

Visit www.westwycombeestate.co.uk

Photographs by Phil Barker

Fig 1 above: **The new house comprises four elements, each of which evokes a local building type. From left to right are a bedroom and study resembling a control tower, a thatched living area with a corrugated iron service range like a barn beyond and a line of bedrooms imitating a greenhouse.** *Fig 2 facing page:* **The entrance archway to the house. The wall screens a parking area**

A hub for living

Housestead, Suffolk

The home of Abigail Hopkins and Amir Sanei

A new house of four discrete elements adopts vernacular forms and materials to striking effect, as **Clive Aslet** discovers

Photography by Paul Highnam

A COUNTRY childhood—how idyllic that can be, especially when cousins and grandparents are on hand and it is possible to run in and out of one another's houses. Yet how can that sense of family togetherness be preserved, as time passes and the little ones reach their teens and twenties? That was the tricky question that faced architects Abigail Hopkins and Amir Sanei some years ago. The solution they found has produced a dwelling—more compound than single house—that is as intelligent in its analysis of the issues as it is sympathetic to the landscape that contains it.

Ms Hopkins is a daughter of Michael and Patty Hopkins, architects of the new Glyndebourne opera house in East Sussex and the Lord's Cricket Ground pavilion in London NW8, as well as joint recipients of the RIBA Gold Medal. In 1995, Sir Michael and Lady Hopkins bought Blackheath House, near Aldeburgh in Suffolk, with a long strip of heathland overlooking the River Alde. Sometimes known as Wentworth Hall or Blackheath Villa, the house had begun as a Victorian shooting lodge, exuberant with tower, chimneys and window bays. After the Second World War, Raymond Erith, based in nearby Dedham, was commissioned to rein in the excess, which he did by paring away the protuberances to create a plain Georgian-style box. The Hopkinses then brilliantly →

Fig 3: **All the elements of the house are freestanding. This view, looking along the bedroom corridor, is taken from the open courtyard at the heart of the plan**

remodelled the interior of this building, but kept the exterior, together with the many lodges and other estate buildings, which survived from the 1880s. The Alde appealed to Sir Michael's love of sailing, for which he designed a fleet of boats suited to the river. The estate buildings became holiday homes for the Hopkins' children and grandchildren.

Ms Hopkins and Mr Sanei occupied a modest cottage on the old service yard of the main house. As their own family grew—they now have five children—the two-bedroom quarters became tight, but meals could be eaten out of doors and the young ones had the run of the hall, as well as the lodges used by other family members. With the passage of time, however, another solution was needed. The couple's attention focused on Middle Lodge, which was then derelict.

Middle Lodge is one of three lodges on the estate, all of which are variants on a theme of brick and pointed gables. To extend it in such a way as to provide the accommodation needed for a family of seven would have overwhelmed the original building and spoilt its character. They began to think the problem through from first principles and finally decided on a new project.

> 'The farmstead form was turned inside out: rather than looking inwards onto a yard, new structures were arranged in a cross'

Old plans show that the Blackheath estate had once been dotted with numerous structures, including several farmsteads. The farmsteads themselves were made up of several discrete buildings, the farmhouse being next to a yard surrounded by barns. Although a yard with a water trough in the middle was suitable for livestock, it was less ideal for a family home, on a site with splendid views of the river. Therefore, the farmstead form was turned inside out: rather than looking inwards onto a yard, new structures—still separate—would be arranged in the form of a cross. Farmstead became Housestead.

Ms Hopkins and Mr Sanei next identified a site on which this could be built, next to →

Fig 4 above: **The curved, corrugated-steel barn.** *Fig 5 facing page:* **The main living space, with its glass walls and slender supports of steel painted in traditional Suffolk pink**

Middle Lodge. A self-seeded plantation of silver birch that had grown up on it could be partially cleared. Husband and wife applied themselves to the design and were heartened to discover that the result might qualify for an exemption from the usual planning restrictions under the so-called Gummer's Law of 1997, which allows buildings of exceptional architectural quality to be treated as a special case (*'We brought back the word "beauty"', April 30, 2025*).

The principal building would be the gathering place of the new home **(*Fig 1*)**. The biggest space, it was designed to evoke the farmsteads that had inspired it. It has a thatched roof, of the traditionally steep pitch to throw off the rain. Thatch is a local material and water reeds grow at Blackheath. As Ms Hopkins comments: 'We wanted the architecture to be as sustainable as possible and for it to have come out of the place.' Alas, it would have taken too long for the reeds to be farmed in a manner to make them suitable for thatch, but another local source was found in the marshes of Walberswick, 15 miles up the Suffolk coast. Famously, thatch provides good insulation, but to achieve the desired standard at Housestead, without specifying an exorbitantly thick roof, it has in this case been laid on a base of a modern insulative material. Do not think, however, that a thatched roof implies that the local vernacular is followed in every particular. For one thing, the roof is supported on a frame of elegantly slim steel lattice, rather than chunky timber columns. For another, the walls are entirely of glass.

Glass was dictated by view. The setting is paramount—why not enjoy it to the maximum? The owners say that, beyond allowing them to feel at one with the landscape, this has created a practical domestic environment. A judicious closing of voile drapes on one side and opening of doors on the other is enough to control the heat, even during a hot summer such as that of 2025; the south front, facing the river, is shaded by a deep overhang of the roof. Double glazing reduces heat loss. Indeed, a low sun during the winter can mean that doors again have to be thrown open, because the floor, made of dark brick, serves to absorb and radiate heat. A close eye is kept on the controls of the log-fuelled boilers and solar hot-water collectors that heat both the hot water and the house itself, which can be read on a mobile phone. The readings show that Housestead is thermally efficient.

> 'It is hoped that the flexibility will mean that Housestead will serve as a family hub for years, if not generations, to come'

Giving visual warmth, the steel structure is painted in a local colour—Suffolk pink, traditional as well as vibrant **(*Fig 5*)**. At first glance, the wooden roof also seems to make reference to age-old building practices, but that is only half right. The material is birch plywood, cut into laths: the strips that, in an old house, would have been plastered. However, there is no plaster here. That would have created another hard surface, on top of the glass walls and brick floor—an acoustic nightmare. Instead, the strips have been left uncovered and they are backed with hessian. The effect is extraordinary. Guests around the dinner table can hear each other perfectly clearly, but it is possible for children to watch television on the living deck above the kitchen at the same time as other family members read newspapers on the sofas at the other end of the roof, unaware of their presence. It is a *tour de force*.

The bedrooms occupy the eastern arm of the cross **(*Fig 3*)**. Here, the roof is ideally positioned for photovoltaic panels, which help reduce the electricity bill. Six bedrooms **(*Fig 6*)** are strung out rather in the manner of stables, linked by an unheated corridor. The walls are made of super-insulated prefabricated OSB board panels, which moderate the temperature at all times of year. Each bedroom is, in effect, a pod, to which other rooms could be added to suit future need. It is hoped that the flexibility will mean that Housestead will continue to serve as a family hub for years, if not generations, to come.

The services are at the back of the house, on the northern front. They include a garage and car-parking space, because it is here that visitors arrive—their view of the river denied them at first by a screen wall **(*Fig 2*)** and what appears to be a corrugated-steel barn, of the kind seen throughout Suffolk. This was principally intended to house boilers and other technology, but enough roof space was left over to provide a cinema-cum-party room

Fig 6 left: **One of the guest bedrooms.** *Fig 7 right:* **A party/cinema room on the upper floor of the barn, under the arched steel roof**

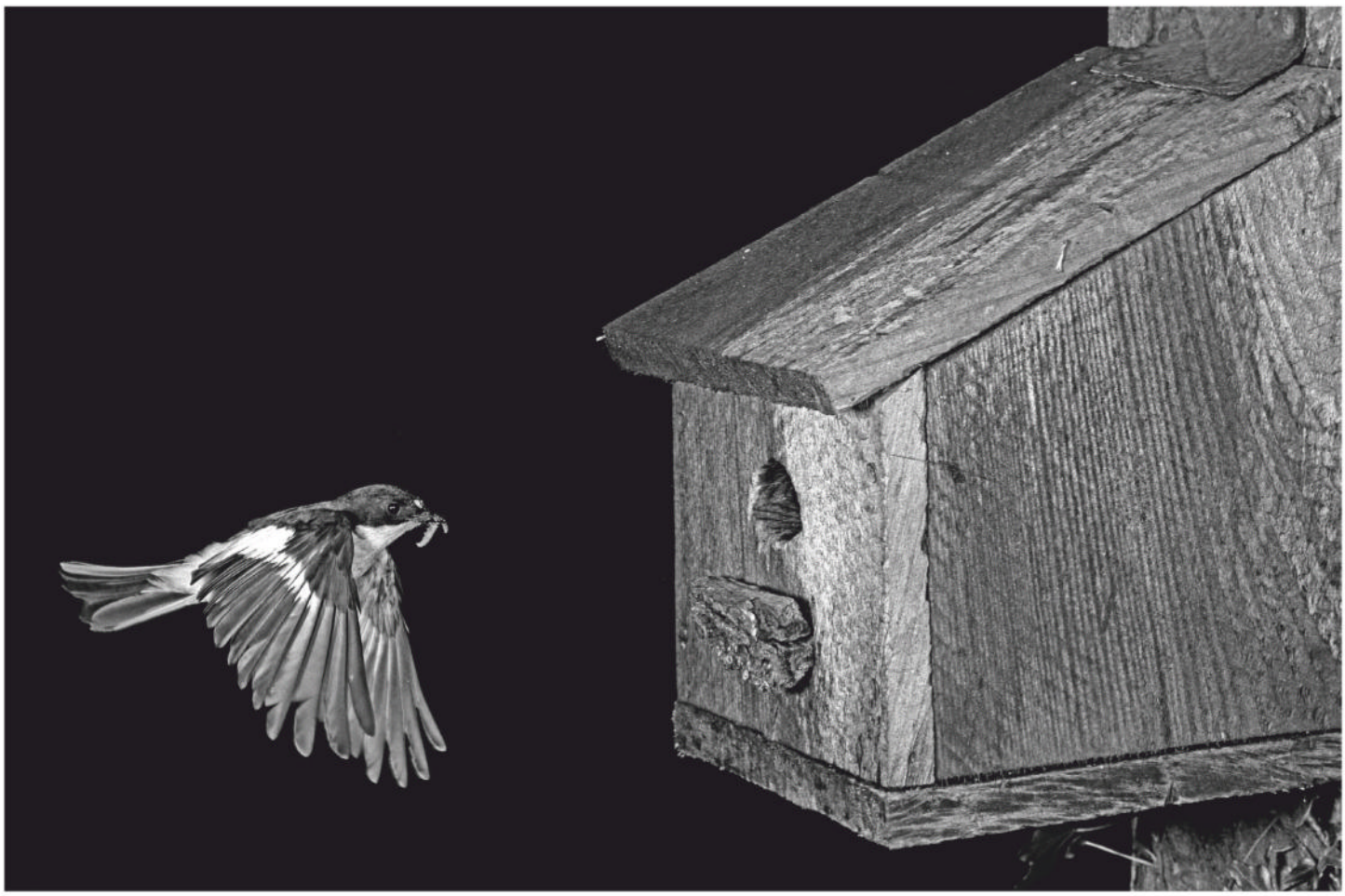
Fig 8: **A view from the study on the upper storey of the tower, based on a Second World War control tower, with the River Alde beyond**

that has proved popular with the younger generation ***(Fig 7)***. Outside, logs are stored in circular corrugated-steel bays fashioned by Suffolk's premier maker of pig arcs—two semicircular arcs joined together provide the requisite shape and space ***(Fig 4)***. They evoke a memory of a treehouse that Mr Sanei once made for the children.

The *pièce de résistance* is surely the study ***(Fig 8)***, which stands at the western extremity of the imagined cross and is connected to the main building by a pathway. It is again inspired by a local building type, notably the towers that punctuate Suffolk's gently rolling landscape. Towers take many forms in this county—church towers, water towers, the magical House in the Clouds at Thorpeness—but the utilitarian form is the one that has greatest resonance here. Control towers that survive on Suffolk's many Second World War airfields and observation towers at ports gave the language. The study is essentially a glass box at treetop height, which is reached by a steel staircase—reminiscent, coincidentally, of the tower that architect Thomas Croft recently created for Doddington Place, Kent. Nowhere could be more peaceful or, surely, more conducive to the design process than this eyrie, where the only temptation is to look at passing birdlife rather than one of the pair of computer screens.

With planning permission obtained, there remained the challenge of actually building a house of such ingenuity and invention. Happily, it was discovered that local craftsmen could supply most of the skills. By 2018, the family could camp in the house. It was to Housestead that they retreated when covid struck. This allowed the wider family to help with the care of Ms Hopkins's father, when the new house—parts of which were still being built—was being stress-tested by family occupation for a period of months. It passed with flying colours.

The landscape remains something of a work in progress. The idea has been to extend the heathland of what, in these parts, is known as the Sandlings. To that end, some local heath was mown and the cuttings laid on the open land around the house in the hope that seeds native to the area would germinate and take root. Topsoil was brought from another part of the 400-acre Blackheath estate, which is known as Gorse Hill. This is now regarded as a happy mistake, due to the number of young gorse bushes that have sprung up—the clue is in the name; even when cut down to the ground, they prove prickly to bare feet. However, Housestead, which was designed in such time that the owners could snatch from their own busy architectural practice of Sanei + Hopkins, has taken shape at its own pace. Not to have a project on the go might, one suspects, be a disappointment to this creative family, kept together by this vital hub of a home on the Alde.



Night flight: Eric Hosking's pioneering flash photography captures a pied flycatcher returning to a nest box at Llysdinum, Wales, in 1954

An eye for a bird

In 1937, Hosking lost his left eye after being attacked by a tawny owl when climbing into a hide in Wales. He wrote philosophically in his autobiography, *An Eye for A Bird*, that the owl was only 'doing its duty' and described it as 'the best possible publicity stunt imaginable'. Two days after the operation, he returned to photograph the same bird, but also admitted later: 'Every time I hear a tawny owl, the hair on the back of my neck rises and queer shivers run down my spine'

WHEN Eric Hosking took his famously luminous photograph of a barn owl in 1935, it was long before the days of digital technology. Then, results were dependent on patience, split-second timing—a fractional hesitation with the hand-operated flash bulb, which he was the first to use, would blow the project—and hope. He would listen for the beat of wings in the dark before activating the flash and it was only when the picture was developed that he realised the bird was clutching a young rat. His other famed image, also of a barn owl, her wings in the heraldic position, was taken in 1948, with a photo-electric shutter release: 'The bird photographed herself, in a lovely angelic pose.'

Hosking (1909–91) is acknowledged as one of the most influential and prolific wildlife photographers. Among the studies he contributed to was one with a stuffed cuckoo to try to understand why the bird favoured the nests of certain species. He recorded bird flight, taking a picture of a redstart that had one wing out and one down by its side. 'When I showed it to the Air Ministry, they thought I had faked it because they said a bird in that attitude would have stalled and fallen to the floor, but it hadn't.'

Born in east London, Hosking was always absorbed by the natural world. His mother recalled that, aged two, he spent all his time in the garden 'collecting beetles and snails'. His first photographic subject, when he was six, was a song thrush on its nest, taken on a box Brownie. 'The result was just a horrible blur, but it made me realise there was more to photography than I first thought.'

Ever an innovator, Hosking led the way with automatic trip cameras

Hosking initially worked in the motor industry until, in 1929, the firm went bust. When job hunting during the Great Depression, he spent time at London Zoo, photographing new arrivals and then rushing the pictures around Fleet Street. He also photographed children, including the Princesses Elizabeth and Margaret in 1935. 'Any aspiring bird photographer should start off by taking children—they are the most difficult things in the world to photograph,' he said on *Desert Island Discs* in 1962, when his chosen luxury was a field guide to the island's birds and his only non-classical track was that of birdsong. *KG*

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The feather forecast

Avian plumage doesn't simply enable flight—this miracle of Nature provides birds with protection, shape and colour and remains a highly desirable fashion accoutrement for us, too, finds **Charles Harris**

WHEN RMS *Titanic* sank in 1912, 40 cases of exotic feathers ordered by New York milliners were lost, their value greater than their weight in gold. A decade later, George Bernard Shaw described chilly, tweed-clad Everest climbers as 'resembling a Connemara picnic surprised by a snowstorm'—but one, George Finch, wore a suit lined with eider down, and stated that 'everyone felt the cold except myself'. He had discovered what penguins already knew: a dense layer of down provides the finest known insulation, enabling the birds' survival both in Antarctic storms and deep underwater. Feathers have many remarkable qualities and they entrance the human eye.

Birds, their 11,000 species greatly outnumbering mammals, evolved over aeons from feathered dinosaurs, via the winged Archaeopteryx, developing plumage incomparably more versatile than fur or hair. Feathers consist of keratin—like hair and nails—but of a reptilian type. The shafts, hollow at the bottom, solid further up, grow from follicles in the skin and from them branch tightly contiguous filaments or 'barbs', which form the vanes of the feather. Each barb has scores of tiny hooks (barbules), which mesh into each other like Velcro to form a smooth surface, restorable if disturbed by combing with the bird's bill.

Feathers are of three main types. Flight feathers are comparatively long, strong and flexible, with narrowed front vanes. Connected by ligaments and tendons to wing bones activated by powerful muscles in the chest, they form aerofoils that enable flight; similar tail feathers assist steering. Contour feathers, closely overlapping and subject to muscular control (they can be puffed out) provide protection, shape and colour. Beneath them, down feathers are hookless, soft and fluffy, retaining internal—or resisting external—heat. Some birds also possess bristles or filoplumes, perhaps with sensory function. A swan may have 25,000 feathers, wrens about 2,000 (small bodies need proportionately more to keep warm). A bird's feathers typically weigh twice as much as its skeleton.

Birds generate lift and thrust by beating their wings. On downstrokes the outer (primary) flight feathers are closed, on upstrokes held apart. Getting aloft is assisted by running or swooping. Teal can take off almost vertically, but swifts, with their almost vestigial legs and long narrow wings for rapid, prolonged flight—sometimes 100,000 miles a year—avoid taking off from the ground as they struggle to generate the required lift from a flat surface. On landing, birds steeply adjust the angle of their wings and open the flight feathers. Unlike conventional aircraft, they generally need no landing run. Hein van Grouw, senior bird curator at the Natural History Museum, Tring, Hertfordshire (which holds the world's largest bird-specimen collection), believes 'birds never unintentionally stall'. Biologist and writer Thor Hanson understandably calls feathers 'the evolution of a natural miracle'.

> 'A swan may have 25,000 feathers, wrens about 2,000. A bird's feathers can weigh double its skeleton'

One miraculous feature is the ability in many cases—notably ducks, dippers and especially penguins—to keep their owners dry. The overlapping of the cover feathers, naturally hydrophobic anyway, is so tight and perfect that water cannot penetrate to the underlying down, which, if wet, would cease to insulate (although downy ducklings somehow swim without disaster). Owls, observes Mr van Grouw, have 'soft, quiet feathers, vulnerable to rain'. Oddly, some seabirds, notably the frigate (with inflatable red chest), lack water resistance, so has to fish by skimming only its beak into the waves.

Plumage is kept in condition by regular preening, involving for most birds the distribution of an 'oil' from a gland under the tail. Doves, Amazon parrots and the dangerous cassowary, which have no preen gland, →

'An armful of white blossom/A perfect commotion of silk and linen': the noble swan in the words of poet Mary Oliver

Above: **From dowager duchesses to the dancers of the Moulin Rouge, ostrich plumes, often dyed fantastic colours, have nodded and shivered their way into society at all levels.** *Facing page:* **Sweet dreams on soft feathers for Abbott Thayer's *Winged Figure*, 1889**

possess instead a type of feather (powder down) that fragments into a dust with conditioning qualities. Partridge chicks, mobile on hatching, grow flight feathers astonishingly fast: egg to air in 14 days. A young albatross needs eight months before decades flying above the restless ocean. Before they fledge, grebes feed nutritious masticated feathers to their young.

Although they are extremely robust, feathers do nevertheless wear out and are vulnerable to lice, but replace themselves by moulting: shedding old stems for replacements grown from the same follicle. When moulting, some birds cannot fly. Mallards are 'sitting ducks' for about a month.

Flight is, for most birds (although perhaps 60 species are incapable), their supreme miraculous ability, from bird-table robin to the almost unbelievable bi-polar migrations of Arctic terns. The feathers of bar-headed geese provide lift and warmth sufficient to cross the Himalayas twice a year. Different wing shapes facilitate the soaring of condors, frigatebirds sleeping in flight, falcons' 200mph stoops and hummingbirds hovering. The tiny wing feathers of the spangled coquette, which oscillate at 80 beats per second, uniquely enable backward flight, so exhausting as to require restorative 'torpors', a short, low-temperature nap. Penguins' feather 'wings' are hard fins.

> 'The wing feathers of the spangled coquette, which oscillate at 80 beats a second, enable backward flight'

Fly-fishermen hope feathers are as beguiling to fish as they are to other birds

Many birds enjoy splendid camouflage, such as the sombre russets of the woodcock or the white of winter ptarmigan, finely portrayed in Archibald Thorburn's paintings (*'Where the wild things are', April 17, 2024*). Yet plumage, especially in the gloom of tropical jungle, is often vividly flamboyant for dimorphic sexual display, exemplified by the peacock. Bright hues—birds' colour vision is superior to ours—result from natural melanin or from light refraction on feather structures. Ostentatious plumage attracts females. Lengthy tails (the superb lyrebird) and strange dances (riflebirds) are effective, too. So admired are spectacular feathers that they have been taken for human embellishment. The iridescent emerald quetzal, which trails its long green tail out of nest holes to mimic ferns, was appropriated for Aztec headdresses. Roman helmets bore ostrich crests; the Chinese liked kingfishers and golden pheasants; Marie Antoinette favoured poufs: towering compositions of hair, plumage and avian parts. The Cheyenne revered eagles.

In the 19th and early 20th century, fashionable women in Europe and North America became passionate about millinery containing feathers, →

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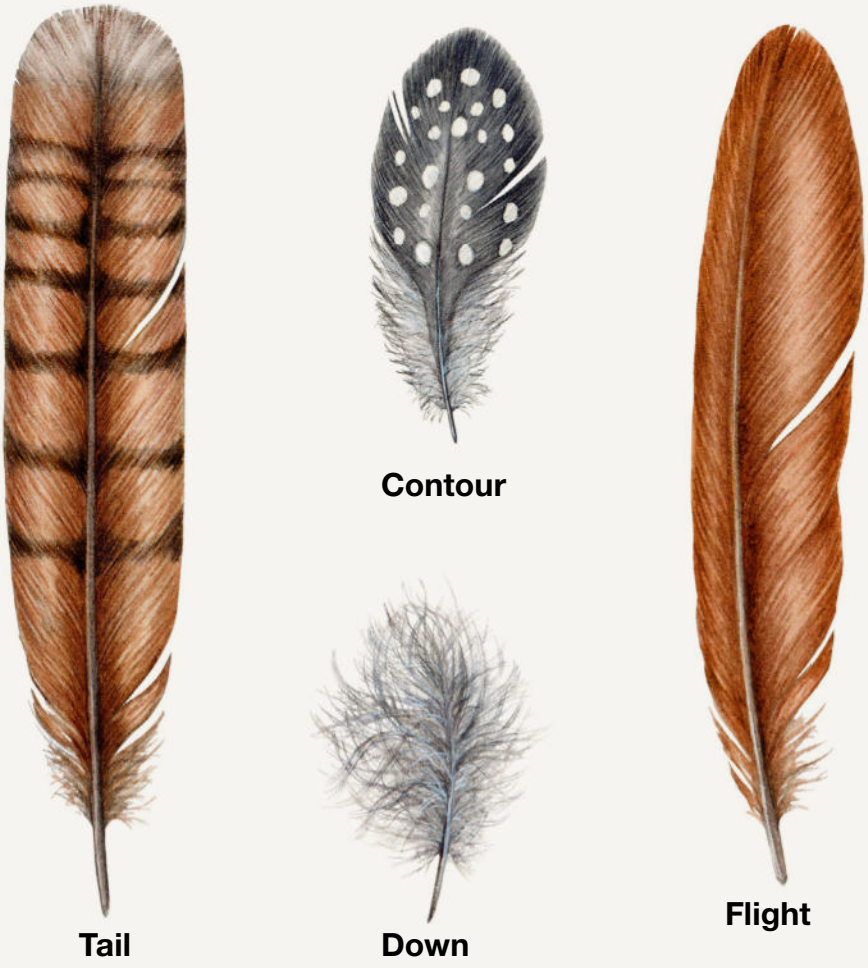

A feather is not merely a feather, but a finely engineered tool of many designs, to achieve warmth, flight and beauty

even complete birds; coveting egrets, ostrich, scarlet ibis, grebes and hummingbirds (some weighing less than an ounce). Ornithologist Frank Chapman noted 40 species worn in New York in 1886, and many millions of birds were killed for fashion. Birds of paradise, naturalist A. W. Wallace's 'masterpieces of nature', suffered dreadfully. Carolina parakeets were hunted to extinction.

> 'Maids once wielded ostrich-feather dusters, their mistresses feather fans and golf balls had feather cores'

This slaughter provoked protest and reform. Societies were founded, protective legislation passed and, after 1914, tastes changed, although the Charleston was danced in feathered headbands and New Guinea tribesmen continued shooting paradise birds into the 1950s. Ostrich feathers from South African farms still entice at the Moulin Rouge. There is contemporary British enthusiasm for plumed hats and fascinators, created from legitimate, sustainable sources. Leading couture milliner Jess Collett reports that 30% of her hats include plumage, especially for Ascot. 'Feathers are fun,' she says. 'They provide delightful movement and are satisfying to work with.' Ordinary feathers can be made to look exotic; Valentino, Gautier and Givenchy have all employed plumage.

Birds with exceptionally dazzling plumage

- **The luminous scarlet ibis of Trinidad**
- The crested hoopoe (*below*)
- **The pastel Alexandra's parrot**
- The marvellously maned greater bird of paradise
- **The elaborate superb lyrebird**

Leader of the farmyard fashion show: a Poland chicken with its flamboyant crest of feathers, which can be white above a black body, laced with black or cuckoo barred

Male preening

It isn't only male birds that have used feathers throughout history to dazzle. Austrian banker Matthaeus Schwarz featured himself in a 16th-century picture book dressed in 137 extravagantly plumed costumes and risible hats, Hawaiian chiefs sported red and yellow feather capes (*Arts & antiques, January 14*) and Emperor Pedro II of Brazil favoured toucan collars. Highland soldiers wore black ostrich 'bonnets', like floaty bearskins, at Balaclava, and their bandsmen still do now, supplied by Jaffé. Sir Elton John has tried feathers (*below*) and Dior produced a translucent feather shirt for men. Feather buttonholes and bow ties are available, too, if you like that sort of thing.

England's only remaining plumassier (feather supplier) is Jaffé et Fils, a family firm in Axminster, Devon. Gilly Jaffé explains, with the vim of one resisting Chinese competition and 'determined to keep my craft alive', how 'splendidly feathers can be coloured and formed… they last indefinitely, provided moths do not get at them'. She meets military, fashion, film and theatrical demand.

Feathers have also had vital practical uses. Military success for centuries was based upon millions of arrows, before archery was replaced by slower firing, less effective, muskets. The 5,000 longbowmen at Agincourt shot about 100 arrows each, mostly fletched with goose feathers. Between the 5th and 19th centuries, almost all writing was done with quill pens, usually from the primary flight feathers of geese or crows. Stems were cured in warm ash, vanes removed and nibs cut with a penknife. (Pens are named after the Latin *penna*, for feather.) Metal nibs appeared in 1822, but Dickens always used a quill.

Artists have also painted with pin feathers: Letitia Kerr was a Victorian miniaturist with exceptional delicacy of touch. Today, Clare Brownlow paints feathers with feathers, creating wildlife pictures in Northumberland with fine-pointed pheasant quills and acrylic ink. She describes a 'very methodical and messy technique' in which, paradoxically, 'precision is key'. Her subjects, whether grouse in flight or vivid macaw, display lively animation and sharp accuracy.

Fly-fishermen tie their hooks with feathers, and may, if prosperous, sleep beneath an eiderdown quilt, a warm, expensive luxury made from down collected from the vacated Icelandic nests of eider duck, sociable birds with a friendly *ooh ooh* call, like happy people in a communal bath. Explorers need down clothing. Maids once wielded ostrich-feather dusters, their mistresses feather fans, and 19th-century golf balls had feather cores.

Avian flight prompted the study of feathers by Leonardo da Vinci, the Wright brothers and modern aero-engineers, for feather wings are more efficiently adjustable than wooden or metal ones. Replicating the attributes of feathers is difficult, although Daedalus, designer of the Cretan labyrinth, legendarily attempted it when imprisoned with his son Icarus. He created wings of feathers and beeswax with which to escape, warning Icarus not to fly too close to the sun. The boy did, however, and fell to his death, as depicted by the artist Gowy in 1637.

'Human' wings in art often signify grace, freedom, proximity to God: think of Caravaggio's *Rest on the Flight into Egypt* (1597) and Bouguereau's *Song of the Angels* (1881). Feathered holiness slays evil in Reni's *The Archangel Michael Defeating Satan* (1635). Chunky classical cherubs sport little wings and Abbott Thayer (1849–1921) specialised in feathered female angels. Sadly, unlike birds, humans lack the necessary pectoral muscles to fly without ethereal assistance. Mankind cannot know the bliss of feathered flight.

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Let's get ready to rumble

One of the most remarkable players in the Winter Olympics, Kays Scotland's curling stones are both *objets d'art* and serious bits of sporting kit, discovers **Harry Pearson**

Photographs by Jeremy Flint

A CURLING stone slides across the ice with a lovely rumble,' observes Jen Dodds. 'The noise when it strikes another stone is wonderful—a satisfying, deep thunk'. Miss Dodds won Winter Olympics gold in Beijing in 2022 with the GB women's curling team and was beginning the defence of that crown in Cortina, Italy, at the time of going to press. At both Games, the 34 year old from Edinburgh has used curling stones made by Kays Scotland, a small firm of dedicated craftspeople in Mauchline, Ayrshire, and the last remaining maker of curling stones in the British Isles.

'Each stone is handcrafted,' reveals Jim English, managing director of Kays. 'Two types of granite are used. The outer stone, which includes the striking bands [the part of the stone that makes the clunk], is fashioned from common green granite. Common green has an elasticity that means it can absorb heavy blows.' Blue hone granite is the insert that forms the running edge, the surface that comes in contact with the ice (and the bit that provides the rumble). 'Blue hone is incredibly fine, which makes it water resistant,' he continues. 'It doesn't draw in moisture, so it's superb for sliding across the ice.'

Kays granite comes from a special source, Ailsa Craig, that mysterious 60-million-year-old 'fairy rock' that pokes up from the Firth of Clyde. Kays was granted the rights to harvest the island's unique rock by the Marquess of Ailsa, whose family has owned the uninhabited island since 1560. It's also a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) and home to great colonies of seals and seabirds. As a result, blasting is prohibited and granite can only be harvested sporadically. 'Because of the breeding habits of the wildlife, we're only allowed to go over in October and November,' points out Mr English. 'Which, in terms of the weather, is not ideal, as you can imagine. It's 10 miles out to sea and the rock faces we quarry from are a long way from the landing area. The common green comes from the south face of the island and the blue hone from the north. It's a laborious process.'

However, the damp, cold and perilous work is worth it. Kays collects about 3,000 tons on each voyage, enough to keep the firm, which makes 150 stones a month, going for 10 years. 'The granite from Ailsa Craig is like no other on Earth,' enthuses Mr English. 'Its unique properties make it almost impervious to freezing temperatures and to hard knocks, too.' It's almost as if it was designed to be made into curling stones.

The stones are fashioned in what was once a snuffbox factory, a building to which Kays relocated from the company's original watermill-powered workshops on the banks of the Ayr in 1911. Making them involves more than 20 processes and 'a lot of physics', but the most important input is the expertise of the workforce. 'We've been honing our techniques here for 150 years,' he continues.

> 'The granite from Ailsa Craig is like no other on Earth'

The technical aspect of making the stones is not the only consideration. 'We're very conscious of the aesthetics—the different colours and markings of the stone,' Mr English says. The result of this careful appraisal is a product that is not only a piece of sporting equipment, but an object of rare and refined beauty.

Kays of Scotland first started making curling stones in 1851. By then, curling as a sporting pastime was already more than three centuries old. Stirling Smith Museum in Dumbarton has curling stones that date from 1511 and the first recorded match took place at Paisley Abbey, Renfrewshire, in the winter of 1541. This most Scottish of sports reached its zenith in Britain during the 1870s, its popularity fuelled by the migration of Scottish tradesmen and a string of unusually harsh winters. Today, dedicated curling facilities in England are few and far between. However, Historical Curling Places, a website devoted to recording the curling ponds of Britain, has confirmed records of more than 2,000 ponds where matches took place, including examples as far south as Brighton and Chichester in Sussex.

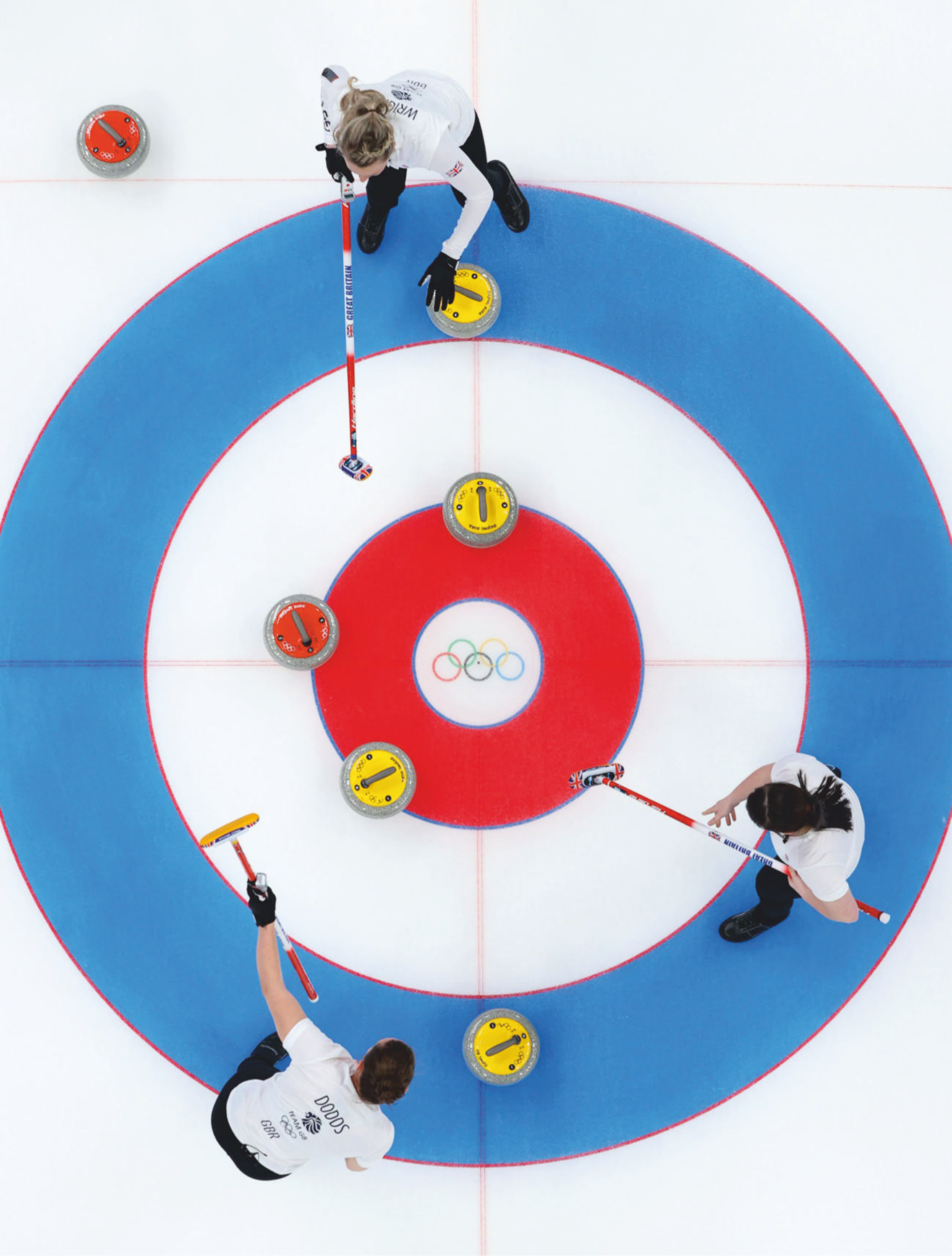
By the last decades of the 19th century, curling was so popular Kays had half a dozen competitors. Stones were made from a poetic panoply of rock: Burnocks, Tinkernhills, Carsphairn Red, Crawfordjohns, Blantyre Blacks. However, following the closure of Bonspiel in Deganwy, North Wales in 1990—which used red and blue trefor quarried in the Llyn Peninsula—only Kays, with its common green and blue hone, remains.

Originally an outdoor sport, curling moved gradually undercover after the opening of the first indoor rink in Glasgow in 1907 and the fashion for country-house curling ponds faded. Today, the majority have long been abandoned, although the curling houses or pavilions where once the stones, brushes and other kit were stored often survive. Most resemble small tennis or cricket pavilions, although some were built in more elaborate styles and now pass for follies. The most celebrated example of the latter is the playfully elegant Thomson Tower in Duddingston, east of Edinburgh, designed by the city's fêted neo-Classical architect William Henry Playfair in 1826.

Despite the sport falling out of favour south of the border, curling remains highly popular in Scotland, with more than 550 clubs boasting some 10,000 members. Kays supplies many clubs with stones, yet still exports close to 95% of production—not only to the global curling powerhouses of Canada, the US, Norway, Sweden and Japan, but also to less likely spots, such as Nigeria, Angola and Mongolia. →

Rock stars: John Brown (*left*) of Kays Scotland, whose curling stones were used at the 2022 Winter Olympics in Beijing where Team GB's Jen Dodds, Vicky Wright and Hailey Duff (*facing page*) won gold

Getty


GREAT BRITAIN
DODDS
GBR

Common green and blue hone granite (*above left*) quarried at Ailsa Craig in the Firth of Clyde provides raw materials for Kays curling stones (*above right*), which are shaped and polished by hand (*below*) using techniques perfected over the company's 175-year history

Precious stones: some 150 meticulously crafted curling stones pass through the Kays workshop in Mauchline, Ayrshire, each month

The stones are hand polished, as they have been for centuries. They weigh just under 40lb and sell for £800 each. It's a sound long-term investment. 'Our stones should last between 20–25 years, depending on the amount of use, and we offer restoration and servicing,' explains Mr English. 'The running surface gets worn by friction, so needs to be re-grooved, and the striking band takes a lot of heavy knocks and needs to be re-ground every 10 years or so.'

> 'Each stone has its own character. No two stones are the same'

In curling competitions, pairs or teams of four each slide two stones (sometimes called rocks) towards the target—four concentric rings on the ice—which is known as 'the house'. The curve or curl of the stone comes from the slow spin that is imparted on it as it leaves the hand. The feverish brushing temporarily melts the surface of the ice, altering the speed and curve of the stone—the quality of the rock is paramount. To the untrained eye, Kays curling stones may look uniform, but that appearance is deceptive. 'The granite is made from about 15 different minerals,' Miss Dodds reveals. 'Each stone has its own unique character. A big part of the skill in curling is figuring out the personality of the stone—some curve more than others, some don't travel so far or so fast. No two stones are the same. They slide differently, bounce off each other in distinct ways.'

Each stone made by Kays is individually numbered, which can help. 'The numbers aid you with the history of the stone,' she continues. 'At the European Championships, for example, the same set of stones has been used several times, so you get to know each number, but characteristics are often changed by use—the stones are rubbed with sandpaper during competition and that affects how they behave. You're always trying to work them out.'

Miss Dodds has been attempting to defend her Olympic title with Team GB in Italy. 'Let's say I'm keeping my fingers crossed,' she admits. Meanwhile, the presence of Kays of Scotland's curling stones at the Winter Olympiad is guaranteed. The company's curling stones were used at the first Winter Games in Chamonix in 1924 and, since 2006, Kays has been the sole supplier of curling stones to the event. The 128 stones it made for the 2026 Games are now in use in Italy. During covid, the stones for Beijing were flown over in a private jet. This time, however, they went by lorry.

Sliding by: country houses with curling ponds

- **Colzium House, North Lanarkshire**
This estate is home to the world's oldest curling club, Kilsyth, founded in 1716
- **Balmoral Castle, Aberdeenshire**
The curling pond on this royal estate is flanked by a piend-roofed curling pavilion with tree-trunk columns
- **Larbert House, Falkirk**
Once the home of the Riddells of Ardnamurchan, the original house (called Mount Riddell) looked out across a curling pond
- **Gosford House, East Lothian**
An eccentric grotto-like curling house can be found at the seat of the Earl of Wemyss and March
- **Netherfield House, South Lanarkshire**
This Georgian mansion close to Strathaven features a curling pond dating from the 1780s

Hats off

The hatbox has long played second-fiddle to fashionable millinery itself, but, in its journey from Regency status symbol to most-elegant luggage in the golden age of travel, there's a world of wonder to unpack, says **Deborah Nicholls-Lee**

The art of the hatbox: a delightful bonnet might be concealed by an equally delightful box

IN a watercolour of 1804 by the English artist Craig William Marshall, a salesman walks along London's Bond Street. A long pole is balanced on his shoulder, strung with an assortment of pastel-coloured hatboxes that swing cheerfully as he strides.

Millinery was booming at the time this scene was painted. Fashionable ladies sought out large, structured bonnets fastened with a long ribbon and gentlemen wore top hats made of silk plush or felted fur. This expanding population of hats needed a home when they weren't on heads—so firms or itinerant sellers, such as the pole-bearing peddler, found a trade in boxes of metal, wood or leather, as well as pasteboard boxes covered in wallpaper or fabric. Some custom-made boxes featured the owner's initials; others were secured with a key. The fancier the hatbox, the more the business stood out.

By the Regency, the containers (sometimes called 'bandboxes', having once housed the stiff bands of starched muslin or linen worn as collars in the 1600s) had become almost as much of a status symbol as the hats themselves. In Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*, the mercurial Lydia, who has squandered money on an unbecoming hat, declares: 'I am glad I bought my bonnet, if it is only for the fun of having another band-box!'

As hats grew bigger—topped with flowers, exotic feathers and fruit—the hatbox became ever larger. In a journal published in 1820, the American chemist Benjamin Silliman recalled a journey by horse-drawn carriage to Birmingham made hugely uncomfortable by the 'huge band-boxes' carried on the laps of his fellow passengers. 'I was obliged to sit sideways, with one arm out of the coach,' he wrote: a 'situation so uncomfortable' that he hopped onto the roof instead.

Ready for the road: a rigid bandbox of the 1930s, decorated by Frank McEntee and designed to keep the most delicate of confections safe

The Victorian era heralded new travel opportunities via railway or steamship and, as noted in the V&A Museum's online archive, 'hatboxes were used for travel as well as for storage' and 'covered in foreign stamps and luggage labels documenting their owners' travels'. For bonnets, rope handles that both secured the box and functioned as a handle became more common, whereas top hats were transported in leather, bucket-shaped boxes, sometimes with a storage space for a hat brush, and lined with soft fabrics, such as satin, velvet or silk.

> 'Ladies used the boxes not only for bonnets, but the thousand and one bagatelles so dear to the feminine heart'

In some ways, the hatbox was the precursor to modern luggage. As a pamphlet produced in 1960 by the Shelburne Museum in Vermont, US, notes: 'Ladies used the boxes not only for their bonnets, but as portable storage compartments for ribbons, artificial flowers and hair pieces, dresses, jewelry and the thousand and one bagatelles so dear to the feminine heart.' To cater for different occasions, some boxes accommodated several hats at once. One wooden example (dated about 1900–25) at the V&A contains six—from a cotton cap with a scalloped frill to a blue velvet bonnet trimmed with lace,

Top of the boxes: a hand-striped hatbox made in the 19th century conveys the shape of the top hat it conceals within

coins, flowers and feathers. Little wonder that, by the 1840s, railway porters had begun charging extra to carry them.

Well-meaning Victorians dispensed advice on travelling with hats. 'A bonnet will look better after a journey if the flowers or feathers are taken out and carried separately in a paper box, and the strings are smoothly rolled, not folded, upon pasteboard,' counselled etiquette expert Sarah Annie Frost in *The Art of Dressing Well*, published in the 1870s. She adds: 'A bonnet or hat should always be dusted with a bonnet-brush and covered with an old silk handkerchief when placed in the band-box. A stand should be always in the box to prevent the bonnet resting on any part of the trimming.' And do take care which bonnet you wear en route. 'Any fancy material, lace or velvet, is in excessively bad taste in a travelling hat,' she warns.

Hatboxes continued to capture the imagination as a new century dawned, becoming vessels of high drama. In A. A. Milne's comedic play of 1923, *The Man in the Bowler Hat: A Terribly Exciting Affair*, a series of cloakroom tickets hidden in hatboxes around London leads to the precious 'Rajah's Ruby'. In Val Andrews's Conan Doyle-inspired *The Torment of Sherlock Holmes* (published in 1999), a large brown hatbox in the left luggage at Victoria Station, 'obviously originally the property of a lady of means', is found to contain a butcher's knife and a bloodstained silk gown.

The hatbox may also have played Cupid. George Bernard Shaw was besotted with the actress Stella Campbell, the original

Above: **High style: Marilyn Monroe carries a hatbox from Saks Fifth Avenue, New York.** *Left:* **In 1911, a lady's waist seems slimmer than ever next to her oversized bandbox**

Eliza in *Pygmalion*. According to one apocryphal story, in a theatrical attempt to woo her, he sent her a hatbox full of flowers with a romantic note tucked inside. A witty exchange of letters followed that lasted 40 years. Upon Campbell's death, a hatbox was discovered beneath her bed, their tender correspondence kept for eternity.

Some hatboxes are instantly recognisable: the pristine white boxes of Royal Warrant holders Lock & Co of St James's Street, SW1, the world's oldest hatters, for example. With their smart black trim and logo full of swirls and flourishes, they are cherished objects →

Alamy; Shutterstock; Mary Evans Picture Library

in themselves, connecting buyers with an illustrious history of distinguished patrons, from Admiral Lord Nelson to Elizabeth II.

Although Society events, such as Royal Ascot and Henley Royal Regatta, still keep Lock & Co busy, millinery more generally has declined since the popularisation of the motor car in the 1920s, which provided a roof to fend off the elements and left little space for a hat atop a head. When peace was declared in 1945, the freedom from uniform led people to cast off their hats in favour of more casual apparel. Later, the rise of youth culture in the 1950s and 1960s saw the new generation reject the traditional dress codes of their parents. Hatboxes were still needed for formal wear, but began to take different forms. Hexagonal boxes were easier to dismantle, meaning that they could be shipped flat, and the advent of plastic saw transparent boxes come onto the market, enabling people to find a given hat at a glance.

> ‘In Milne’s comedic play of 1923, cloakroom tickets hidden in hatboxes lead to the “Rajah’s Ruby”’

The Empty Box Company, however, is keeping tradition alive, and has been creating handmade hatboxes in its Devon workshop since 1988. It was a Christy’s top-hat box found in a gentleman’s tailor shop in Norwich that inspired co-founders Giselle Hulme and James Teague, who realised the rarity of these charming vessels. Today, striped boxes and William Morris designs are their bestsellers.

Their circular hatbox ‘has a traditional yet timeless feel to it, with ribbon, either tied to the lid, or from the base, to tie as a bow on top, to give that Edwardian feel of unwrapping and revealing something very special inside,’ points out Ms Hulme, who trims the inside with lace and uses pH-neutral board and acid-free tissue paper to prevent discolouration. Memorable commissions include window displays for Harrods and the hatboxes in Rose’s wedding trousseau in *Downton Abbey*. Customers also use their hatboxes as memory boxes, gift boxes or home storage.

In 1905, a frustrated Canadian writer stowed a rejected novel in one. Two years later, lifting the lid on the box, she rediscovered the manuscript and tried anew. The author was L. M. Montgomery, and the book was *Anne of Green Gables*, an immediate bestseller. It seems as if hatboxes needn’t always contain hats: ideas can percolate there, too.

Above: **The fun of the bandbox: Lydia Bennet would have been in heaven with the Hat-box Girls of Sydney Town Hall, Australia, in the 1930s.** *Below:* **Whether leather—in a design of 1940 by Clarence W. Dawson (*left*)—or leather-look hard plastic by Samsonite (*right*), a sturdy hatbox will keep all kinds of treasures safe**

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The whole darn truth

Make do and mend is enjoying a creative revival. **Debora Robertson** gets out her darning wool and defies the tyranny of fast fashion, one stitch at a time

MY own personal darning revival happened during the early days of covid. In the first lockdown, I'd cleaned everything that didn't move and I don't like banana bread, so I was looking for something else to do. During one of these cleaning sessions, I found a box of cashmere jumpers that had become victims of the moth. I'd put them away thinking that one day I'd mend them, but, in my heart, I knew this was a delaying tactic for their inevitable resting place: the bin.

Perhaps, now, they could be saved? I had some rudimentary darning skills taught to me by my grandmother. She and her four sisters, born during the First World War and becoming young wives and mothers during the Second, knew thrift like a family friend. They all had good hands. They could sew, crochet and knit—and, of course, they could darn. I always marvelled at how they made a hole in a sweater or sock vanish or, if it were too large for invisible mending, cover it with tiny, neat stitches.

I ordered darning wool online. Years ago, I'd interviewed a woman about keeping chickens and asked if she had advice for first-timers. 'Get some ex-battery hens, because, however many mistakes you make, you're still going to give them a better life,' she said. I kept this in mind as I looked at my jumpers and cards of wool. However poor my darning might be, I was taking something I couldn't wear and potentially transforming it into something I could.

To get started, I went to the internet's knowledgeable grandmother, YouTube, and watched dozens of hypnotically soothing videos of women working magic with thread. I remembered how, if my own grandmother didn't have a wooden darning mushroom to hold the fabric taut as she stitched, she used a light bulb. I gathered my sewing basket and a light bulb and got started. My efforts were imperfect, but immensely satisfying. I loved defying the tyranny of fast fashion, one stitch at a time.

In my research into techniques, some of the most exciting websites and videos transcended darning as a practical skill and turned it into art. This wasn't your grandmother's darning. It reminded me of the Japanese art of *kintsugi*, where breaks and cracks in porcelain are repaired with lacquer and gold, the mends visible because they honour the object's history and renewal, embracing the flaws and enhancing its beauty.

> 'I always marvelled at how they made a hole in a sweater or sock vanish'

Many of these new visible darning techniques come from Japan. *Beyond Darning: Creative Mending Techniques* by Hikaru Noguchi has clear diagrams of myriad stitches and mends, but it's more than that. Ms Noguchi is a textile designer and a leading light in the Japan Darning Association—the very existence of such an organisation tells you a lot—and many of the projects in her book are for brooches and badges to pin over holes. The brooches have names such as After Chaos and Ruins, and they serve a greater purpose than simply covering up holes. They use precious scraps of fabric from unsalvageable clothes, such as a baby's dress or a favourite shirt, and gives them a second life.

British textile artist Alexandra Brinck—whose book *Knit Repair: A Comprehensive Guide to Invisible Mending for Knitwear* will be published by Quadrille/PRH this year—says: 'The Japanese philosophy of *wabi-sabi* is something that really appeals to me. In the same way that *kintsugi* is used to celebrate imperfections as part of an object's history, using visible mending techniques on textiles is a wonderful way to enhance and elevate them. I especially love when a garment becomes an ongoing work in progress—my favourite pair of jeans is a textile ship of Theseus…

'I've been passionate about mending all my life and, for the past few years, it's been the main focus of my work,' Ms Brinck continues. 'Perhaps the most exciting part is the creative problem solving. Although a lot of repairs are fairly routine, the ones I love best are the really complicated commissions, where I start off with no idea of how to carry out the work—or even if it's actually possible.'

When it comes to providing an item with a new lease of life, Ms Brinck believes that, often, it's less about the physical object than keeping a memory alive. 'People want me to restore garments that hold special meaning to them,' she reflects. 'Quite often, they'll contact me to have a garment repaired as part of a grieving process (whether consciously or not). It feels very special to be allowed to be part of people's lives in a small way.' As we all attempt to stitch together our perfectly imperfect existences, darning honours what we once had and gives it a whole new life.

'Beyond Darning: Creative Mending Techniques' by Hikaru Noguchi is published by Quickthorn (£19.99)

Needles at the ready, keep those hands steady

'Don't let perfection be the enemy of good—there's no such thing as a bad repair,' believes textile artist Alexandra Brinck. 'Anything that keeps a garment out of landfill is a win. I try to encourage people to have a go. Most of the time, the worst that can happen is that a broken garment remains broken—and, if you make a repair you're unhappy with, you can simply remove it and start over. Repair cafés can also be great for anyone who wants to pick up some new skills.'

She recommends these books for beginners

- *Modern Mending: How to Minimise Waste and Maximise Style* by Erin Lewis-Fitzgerald (Search Press, £14.99)
- *Stitch It, Don't Ditch It: Simple Hand-sewn Repairs to Help You Love Your Clothes for Longer* by Mary V. Morton and Jeanna Wigger (Penguin, £14)

Seat of learning: a Cornish woman teaches her grandson a (potentially painful) lesson in longevity by repairing his torn shorts in situ

Getty; Mary Evans Picture Library

Amie Elizabeth White

Heights of fashion

MUCH has been said about the wardrobe choices in Emerald Fennell's film adaptation of *Wuthering Heights*, not least those chosen for the lead, Margot Robbie, who appears in a *Milchmädchen*-inspired dress, a cellophane-like confection tied with a bow and a high-shine red latex skirt to match a high-shine red rubberised floor. The real talking point, however, is surely the array of vintage brooches—many archival Chanel—sewn across her costumes and into her hair.

Brooches are becoming a high-profile feature of contemporary fashion, bolstered by a shift away from ultra-minimalism to something more expressive, and proving a low-commitment way to stamp your personal aesthetic onto an outfit. 'There has been a big rise in interest in vintage brooches over the past year,' says jewellery specialist Susannah Lovis, 'from both men and women wanting to add a unique touch to their wardrobes.'

The advantages of vintage or antique pieces are ample: most are rare, handmade and have a rich history. Some are encrusted with gemstones and their aged aesthetic means even the ornate resist looking ostentatious. What is new, however, is their placement. Ms Robbie required 23ft of hair pieces to achieve her looks, but a brooch can easily find a home atop an ordinary bun or fastened to a clip or band. The more delicate styles can be pinned onto the collar or cuffs of a shirt and larger ones could fix a silk scarf *à la mode* around the waist, or a woollen one draped over the shoulder. A turtleneck offers a neat pedestal for pinning, as do button-down jackets or knitwear.

Hats are no stranger to the brooch, either. Designs can add whimsy to the side of a fedora or be positioned directly on the front, as Coco Chanel so eloquently demonstrated. The icing on the cake? Vintage and antique brooches don't attract VAT, Ms Lovis notes, 'so there is a slight financial incentive, as well as more choice'. Pin up, chuck. *www.susannahlovis.com*

Emulate Coco Chanel in her Astrakhan hat with a Tasaki owl (*top left*) or Tiffany fan (*left*) from Susannah Lovis

Lasting impressions

Retail spaces are fast evolving into galleries designed to immerse you in their 'universe', extend their appeal beyond the products on sale and fight back against the digital age. Consumers, too, are seeking a physical experience rather than succumbing to endless scrolling. It is the reason why bricks-and-mortar shops are having a renaissance and paper catalogues are staging a comeback. Incorporating art enhances the environment, making a store inviting and encouraging customers to engage with a brand on a deeper level.

Some offer a story, too. Cartier's refurbished boutique on Sloane Street, London SW1, features a hand-painted mural bearing the flora and fauna of its heritage designs, including a brooch that belonged to Elizabeth II, and its signature panther bursting from the centre.

Elsewhere, Penhaligon's has reimagined its Regent Street store, W1, using mosaics by the London School of Mosaic, a mural of the English countryside by Claire Basler and a majestic bronze lion by Hamish Mackie (*above*), which operates as a fragrance profiling table.

Art is reshaping the retail experience for the better, although the real positive may be the entertainment it provides for long-suffering partners as their other halves pick their shoes.

Watch this space

If you are curious about the British watchmaking industry or seek to purchase something distinctive from somewhere other than the big names, British Watchmakers' Day, which returns for its third iteration at Lindley Hall, London SW1, on March 7, should be on your radar. Hosted by the Alliance of British Watch and Clockmakers, the event spotlights independent British brands, ranging from Christopher Ward and Bremont to Studio Underd0g, Fears and Justin Richardson (*below*), to celebrate the creativity and collectability of home-soil horology, at every price point. Some 26 special editions have been announced for this year, each limited to a maximum of 50 pieces (some as few as three) and only available to attendees. If acquiring isn't on your agenda, meeting the movers, shakers and makers behind the resurgence of British watchmaking is worth the queue. Tickets are £15 (www.britishwatchmakers.com)

Getty

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A tryst with amethyst

Amie Elizabeth White celebrates the multi-faceted palette of February's birthstone

→ Suzannah London
Tuxedo waistcoat checked houndstooth tweed, £690 (www.suzannah.com)

→ Kiki McDonough
Amethyst and diamond pendant necklace, £2,500 (www.kiki.co.uk)

↑ NasonMoretti
Pesco verde purple twisted dessert coupe, £80 (www.artemest.com)

→ Clare Haggas
Caledonia soft amethyst classic pure silk scarf, £129 (www.clarehaggas.com)

→ Ettinger London
Sterling hunter flask, £155 (www.ettinger.co.uk)

↑ Floris London
Purple Mémoire eau de parfum, £180 for 100ml (www.florislondon.com)

↑ House of Bruar
Men's country lambswool T-zip sweater, £59.95 (www.houseofbruar.com)

↑ Turnbull & Asser
Lavender and purple check wool long socks, £60 (www.turnbullandasser.co.uk)

↑ Polène Paris
Numéro Neuf mini edition mauve, £390 (www.uk.polene-paris.com)

→ Daylesford x Colefax and Fowler
Quince garden napkin in lilac, £22 (www.daylesford.com)

← Budd
Stripe pyjamas in lilac, £405 (www.buddshirts.co.uk)

↑ Ananya
18-carat rose gold, white diamond and African amethyst bead chakra bracelet, £8,600 (www.ananya.com)

→ Asprey
Chaos earrings in 18-carat rose gold with amethyst, £6,500 (www.asprey.com)

An eye to the future

What changes to a house do most to enhance its aesthetics, function, comfort, sustainability and longevity? On March 24, leading experts in architecture, interior design, craft and restoration will share the secrets to maximising possibilities and protecting value at Daylesford's magnificent Heritage House in Gloucestershire

Daylesford's Heritage House in Gloucestershire will play host to a COUNTRY LIFE panel discussion featuring five leading industry experts

FOR most of us, our homes aren't only the places we choose to spend our lives—but also our single biggest asset. The way we configure, design and maintain a house—and the materials we use to do so—affects both our enjoyment of a house and also its value. Because maximising these requires a holistic approach and the advice of experts in a number of disciplines, COUNTRY LIFE has invited five established figures, each with deep experience in their respective fields to talk: the architect Jonathan Dinnewell, the interior designer Sean Symington, the stone specialist Edward Smith of Artorius Faber, eighth-generation builder Tim Moulding and Joanna Cocking of Hamptons.

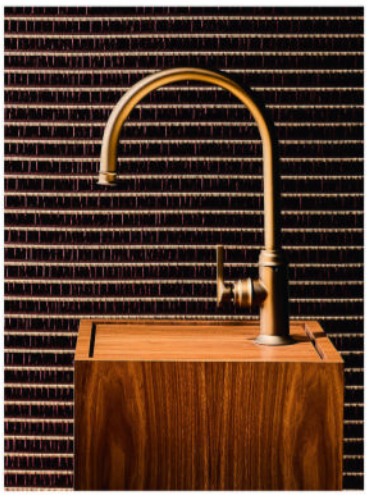
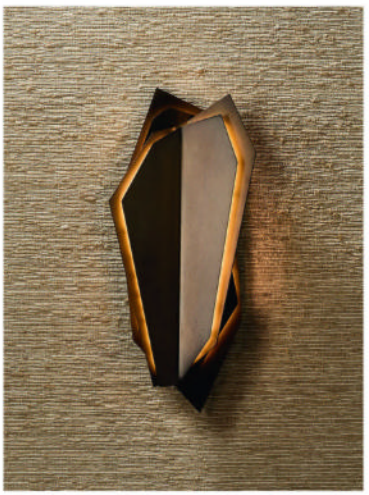
Collectively, they have been involved in restoring, building and enhancing houses of different styles and ages. At this reader event, they will offer advice on where resources are best focused. Is it better to extend or reconfigure existing space? What are the benefits of converting outbuildings? What is the secret to achieving thermal efficiency and creating sustainable energy? How can one design a house that will stand the test of time?

The event, which will include a two-course lunch, will include a panel discussion, a Q&A session and opportunities to discuss individual issues—and to explore Daylesford with its world-famous farm shop.

Date Tuesday, March 24
Time 11am–2pm
Tickets £65, to include a two-course lunch and a glass of wine. To book, telephone **01608 692871** or visit **www.daylesford.com/shop/events/upcoming-events/country-life-reader**

MEET THE PANELLISTS

From left: **Jonathan Dinnewell** is a director at Smallwood Architects and has worked with many of his clients for more than 40 years, often across multiple projects and generations. Much of his work focuses on historic and country houses and he is particularly interested in what gives these buildings longevity. **Sean Symington** leads his Cotswolds-based boutique interior-design studio. Known for interiors that balance classic design with a fresh, playful edge, his work is grounded in a deep respect for architecture, craftsmanship and the way people truly live now and for generations to come. **Edward Smith** is one of the founding directors of Artorius Faber, a specialist in bespoke British stone. This family-run business is based in Somerset and embraces a classic English sensibility, suited to both traditional and contemporary design styles. **Tim Moulding** is the eighth-generation managing director of one of the South's leading building companies, specialising in historic buildings and high-end country-house new build and restoration. **Joanna Cocking** has worked in the property sector in London and across the UK for almost 33 years, joining Hamptons in 2001. Leading the Prime Country Sales team and Private Office, she is ideally placed to advise for the full process of buying and selling.

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Stars of the show

Amelia Thorpe previews the highlights at next month's unmissable interiors event, London Design Week

↑ Inspired by the past
Drawing on her knowledge of antiques and instinctive understanding of classical design, Henriette von Stockhausen (*above*) of VSP Interiors is launching a furniture collection in collaboration with specialist maker Oficina Inglesa. Recognising that antique pieces often present challenges of scale and proportion in modern homes, they have created a collection of four-poster beds, coronas, bedside tables and chairs to suit today's interiors. Prices for the four-poster beds start at £8,460 (020–7226 4569; www.oficinainglesa.com)

↑ Pattern play
Explore new fabric and wallpaper designs by the Cotswold interior designer and textile artist Cinny Aumonier (*right*), on show at the Tissus d'Hélène showroom. The range includes Raine wallpaper in Baked Apple, £305 per 10m roll, inspired by 18th-century Indian motifs (020–7352 9977; www.cinny.co.uk)

↑ Light touch
Birdie Fortescue's pop-up stand showcases the Vasanti lighting collection of sculptural lamp bases, from £155 each, and patterned shades, from £85 each (01328 851651; www.birdiefortescue.co.uk)

→ Tiger, tiger
Andrew Martin's new Great Hall collection includes the Tiger Tree cushion, £119, featuring richly embroidered motifs on linen (020–3887 6113; www.andrewmartin.co.uk)

HECTOR **FINCH**

Interiors

↑ In good shape
A collection of elegant tiles by leading American design company Studio McGee is being launched at West One Bathrooms in collaboration with tile specialist Ann Sacks. Available in five colours and in square-edge and playfully scalloped formats, the Ashton Meadows collection of ceramic tiles costs from £270 per sq m (0333 011 3333; www.westonebathrooms.com)

→ The magic of Kit Kemp

On Monday, March 9, from 3pm–4pm, join internationally renowned interior designer and founder of Firmdale Hotels Kit Kemp (*right*) in conversation with Giles Kime, Executive Editor of COUNTRY LIFE, as they explore her distinctive approach to interiors. Drawing on her new book, *Design Stories*, Mrs Kemp reveals the ideas, inspirations and experience that bring her spaces to life. Reflecting on the relationship between art and interiors and the scope of her family-run practice, which spans hotel and domestic interiors, new-builds and the design of textile and ceramic collections, this is a rare opportunity to hear from one of the most influential figures in design. Afterwards, she will be signing copies of *Design Stories* (£45, Rizzoli). Talk Theatre, Design Club, Second Floor, Design Centre East, SW10. To book tickets, which cost £10, visit www.dcch.co.uk

↓ In the balance
The two-tiered Terrazza steel side table features subtly tapered legs linked by hand-moulded steel threads, as if bound together by rope. It is hand-finished in Red Earth and Gold in Porta Romana's painting studio, and is priced at £3,888 (020–7352 0440; www.portaromana.com)

↑ In a spin
The spun-brass Octavia pendant, £654, can be painted in any colour of your choice, from Hector Finch (020–7731 8886; www.hectorfinch.com)

The curated home
Join journalist and author India Knight (*above*), interior designers Jojo Barr of House Nine and Trilbey Gordon of Trilbey Gordon Design + Interiors as they chat to *The Times* and *The Sunday Times* interiors editor Katrina Burroughs about rooms that have a story to tell—and the joys of daring experimentation in design. After the talk, Ms Knight will sign copies of her new book, *Home: How to Love it, Live in it and Find Joy in it* (Fig Tree, £22). Thursday, March 12, 11.30am–12.30pm, at the Talk Theatre, Design Club, Second Floor, Design Centre East, London SW10. Tickets cost £10 each. Visit www.dcch.co.uk to book →

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Interiors

↑ Good angle
Versatile and practical, the adjustable Atelier wall light can be angled to illuminate a cosy reading spot, a kitchen counter or to highlight an attractive display. It costs £199 from The Soho Lighting Co (020–8106 1221; www.soholighting.com)

↑ Heritage collection
In celebration of its 150th anniversary, the House of Liberty (www.libertylondon.com) unveils a wallpaper range inspired by its extraordinary design archive, priced from £110 per m. The full glory of the collection—and the latest fabric offerings—can be enjoyed at the Rubelli showroom

→ Fine finish
The Roxy floor lamp, £960 by Julian Chichester, features a hand-applied Antique Mahogany finish for a unique result and is shown here with a Round lampshade in Red Wicker, from £135 by Fermoie (020–7622 2928; www.julianchichester.com)

↑ Aged beauty
The new Ashton rug, £761 per sq m, is from Jennifer Manners's Heritage collection of classic designs given a contemporary twist. The pure-wool rug is finished with a proprietary technique that achieves a gently worn appearance without damaging the integrity of the fibre, creating a look that appears softened by time (020–3903 0687; www.jennifermanners.co.uk)

→ Super women
What can be learnt from the achievements of the world's greatest female designers and tastemakers, such as Eileen Gray (*right*)? Who has created the most valuable legacy? Come and find out at an inspiring event on the first day of London Design Week at 10.30am on Monday, March 9 featuring the interior designers Henri Fitzwilliam-Lay and Anahita Rigby, Tat London founder Charlie Porter and Jennifer Manners, founder of the eponymous rug brand. It will be moderated by Country Life's Giles Kime and hosted by Hector Finch. Entry is free. Hector Finch, Design Centre East, Third Floor Chelsea Harbour Design Centre, Lots Road, London SW10 (020–7731 8886; www.hectorfinch.com)

London Design Week takes place at the Design Centre, Chelsea Harbour, London SW10, from March 9–13, offering the opportunity to see new launches from more than 135 showrooms plus pop-up house guests, and enjoy an inspiring programme of events. Visit www.dcch.co.uk for details

Simon Brown; Boz Gagovski; Toby Mitchell; Francesco Guidicini; Getty

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A labour of love

LIKE many large Victorian mansions, Oakhurst Hall, a mile from the market town of Oswestry in Shropshire, has had various incarnations during its 170-year history. Built for the Venables family in 1854, it was leased by an engine manufacturer during the Second World War and then became a boarding house for Oswestry Girls' High School, where the computer-software pioneer and *Kindertransport* refugee Dame Vera Stephanie Shirley studied. In the mid 1980s, the house was converted into a private residence with commercial premises.

Put up for sale in 2019, the house caught the eye of Catherine and Alan Halliday-Taylor, who moved from Surrey with their three sons. Then the pandemic struck and they decided to embark on a renovation project. In 2022, the house featured on Channel 4's *Renovation Nation* in which Mrs Halliday-Taylor invited 'Old Oakies' back to see how a dormitory had been turned into the main bedroom and the school dining room into a kitchen/breakfast room.

'Our children have flown the nest sooner than planned and the hall is looking for its next family,' says Mrs Halliday-Taylor. The eight-bedroom house, which spans some 12,000sq ft and stands in about seven acres, is on the market for £3 million through Savills (01952 239500).

Poet's corner

THE Cambridgeshire cottage that was once home to the Scottish poet and critic Edwin Muir has come to the market with Cheffins. Born on a farm in the Orkney Islands in 1887, Muir married Willa Anderson in 1919 and the couple spent a few years living in Prague, then in Czechoslovakia, Dresden in Germany and Salzburg and Vienna in Austria. Together, they worked on influential translations of German-language writers and were the first to translate works by Franz Kafka into English.

Priory Cottage, in Swaffham Prior, was Muir's home for the last three years of his life and it was where he wrote some of his best-known Cold War-based poems. He died in 1959. His wife wrote about finding the cottage in her book, *Belonging*: 'Most old English cottages are cursed with very small rooms and as soon as we walked into [the sitting room], we nodded to each other and said: "This is it."' The new owners of the cottage will no doubt want to stamp their own decorative mark on the property. It has four bedrooms (one on the ground floor) and an established walled garden. £680,000 (01638 663228).

A chapel in St John's Wood, London NW8, which served as the filming location for Queen's *Radio Ga Ga* music video in 1984, has been converted into five two- to four-bedroom apartments. Now named Connaught House, prices start from £5.165m with Valouran (020–3093 8224)

My first house in the country Philip Mould

Where is it?
Near Chipping Norton in west Oxfordshire

A quick description
An early-17th-century, four-bedroom stone house with a garden and surrounding fields

How did you find it?
It came onto the market four years before we found it. My wife, Catherine, asked for the brochure and kept it close. We live in London and weren't really in a position to buy anything—it was a whim—but then, when it came up for sale again, it felt like destiny

What made you buy it?
There was something about the brave way it had stood on the landscape for so long

Favourite aspect of the house
The embracing smell of wood, smoke and water, which has become the smell of home. We're high up and surrounded by ponds and a stream in the garden. Inside, it's full of oak beams, panelling and, in winter, two fires burn in its capacious fireplaces

Best memory of living there
During lockdown, we removed an unnecessary curtain of yew hedge and thereby visually reconnected the house to its surrounding meadows. Restoring the ancient meadows has been a 20-year project. Ten years ago, upliftingly, an abundance of self-seeded orchids moved in

Biggest mistake
Before we knew better, we allowed cement rather than lime mortar to fill crevices on one of the outer walls. The house looked as if it wanted to spit them out. We got it redone instantly

Is there anything unusual about the house?
Despite small accidents of age, the house has resisted all of the akrasia that you would normally expect, such as porches and lean-to extensions. It stands like a neglected Jacobean portrait: shabby, but true

Biggest indulgence
We removed a section of stone wall over the stream to create a dropping waterfall on the edge of the rose garden

What happened to it?
We still own it. London is a necessity, but this is home

Philip Mould is an art dealer, writer and broadcaster. He is currently working on a book about life through art due out next year and his latest television series of 'Fake or Fortune?' will be broadcast this summer

What's hot…

Dubai domination
Knight Frank's Global Super-Prime Intelligence report for the last quarter of 2025 reveals that the Emirate set a new record with 500 sales, about three times the London tally. 'Dubai's record year capped a powerful multi-year run of wealth inflows and super-prime new-build delivery,' says head of research Liam Bailey.

Scottish magnet
Property in St Andrews outstrips the wider Scottish housing market, commanding a 109% premium above the national average, according to Savills. 'The combination of heritage, coastline, world-renowned golf and an exceptional university creates a level of appeal few locations can match,' says Jamie Macnab, head of country-house sales.

…and what's not

A £1m budget
Although it would once have gone far, today £1m is considered a 'very modest starting point' when trying to buy in fashionable central London neighbourhoods, according to a report by Black Brick using data from LonRes.

No safe haven
Following the 2008 financial crisis, buyers from around the world were drawn to bricks and mortar in prime central London. That's no longer the case as global investors continue to leave, say Knight Frank.

Compiled by Arabella Youens

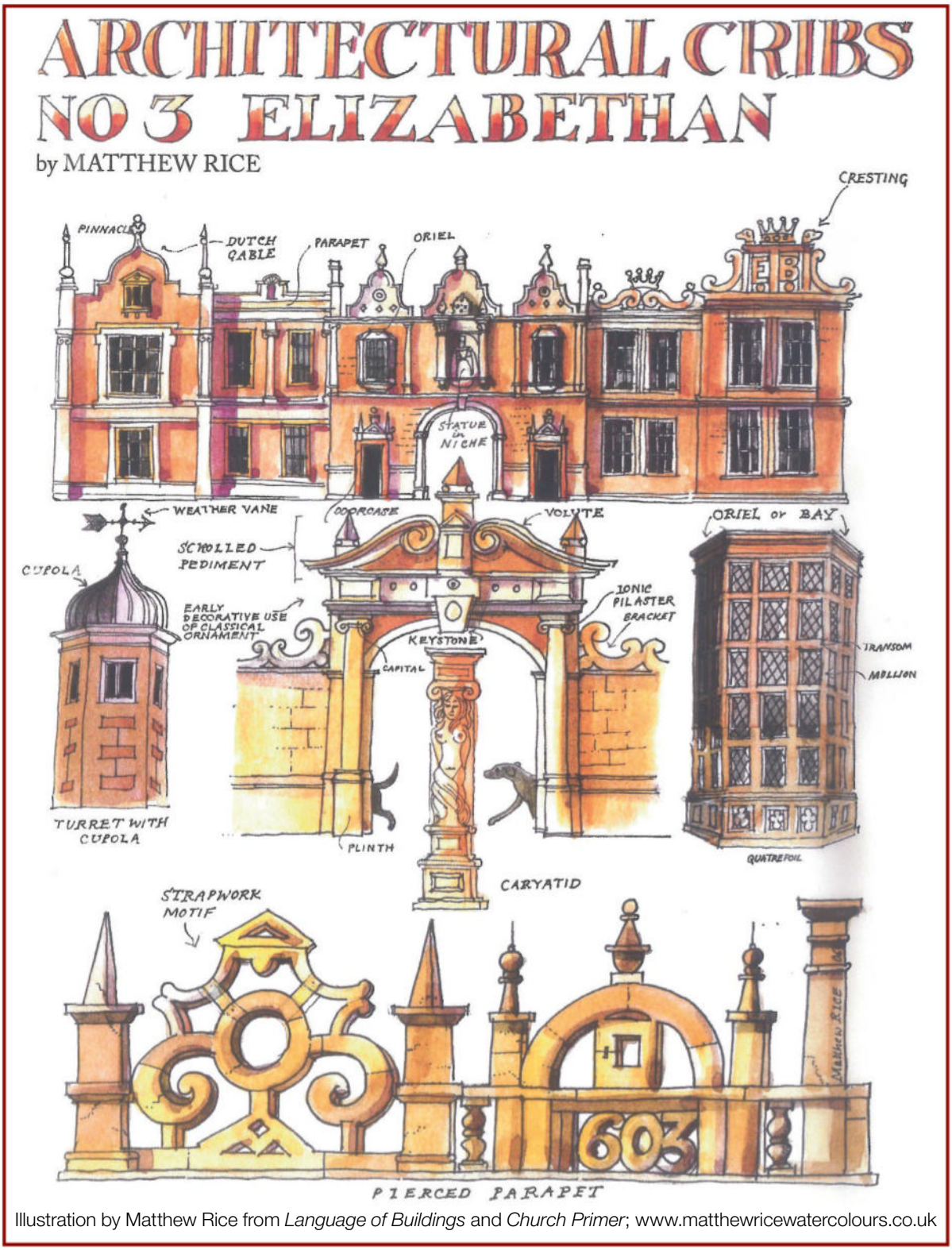

Illustration by Matthew Rice from *Language of Buildings* and *Church Primer*; www.matthewricewatercolours.co.uk

The Orchard is a Grade II-listed five-bedroom home in Chiswick, W4, built for the artist Henry Marriott Paget, who illustrated works by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle. It is on the market with Fletchers for £4.95m (020–8987 3000) and stands in Bedford Park.

← Designer-developer Finchatton has launched Park House, a new-build six-bedroom home set in 22 acres near Odiham in Hampshire. It is the second country-house project for the London developer and it is on the market for £6.95m through Savills (020–7016 3780)

Julie Harding

Wood you believe it!

A timber addition to a home brings many elements to the party, not least practical extra space, sometimes arresting views and an aesthetic warmth that will always appeal to natural-materials enthusiasts

→ East Sussex, £950,000

Burnt Barn Cottage's spacious English Heritage garden room was constructed in 2011. As well as having windows on three sides and exposed brick and wood throughout, it also has a woodburning stove, meaning that it can be used across the seasons whatever shenanigans the elements are getting up to outside. A door leads into the sitting room, which, in turn, enjoys access to the adjoining boot room and hall, and these then lead into the kitchen/dining room. The three bedrooms on the first floor have plenty of period features, including exposed ceiling timbers, and, although the part-tile-hung Burnt Barn Cottage isn't listed, its recent renovations have been carried out tastefully and sympathetically with its history in mind. As well as a summerhouse, outside there is a carport, a garage with a studio/office above and almost three-quarters of an acre of grounds. The village of Catsfield is about a mile away and Battle, with its evocative Battle of Hastings site and mainline station access, about 3½ miles. *Batcheller Monkhouse (01424 775577)*

↑ Cheshire, £2.65 million

Bluebell Cottage near Alderley Edge has an attractive timber conservatory that sits just off the kitchen/dining room and opens directly onto the south-facing gardens—the perfect place for quiet reflection or unhurried conversations with old friends. This garden offers manicured lawns, layered planting and landscaped terraces. Agent James Webster says: 'Bluebell Cottage has a lovely rural, but not remote feel. It has that classic England country-garden quality.' The kitchen has a four-oven Aga, plus a granite-topped island, and it forms the heart of this home. In total, there are five reception rooms on the ground floor, including a cinema room, and four characterful bedrooms, with exposed timber throughout the house adding warmth to the interior. Outdoors is equally as stylish as the inside and, as well as a one-bed annexe, there is even an alfresco bar with pizza oven and spa. *Jackson-Stops (01625 540340)*

↑ → Kent, £2.8 million

Gothic-style Mountfield House has an orangery (almost) like no other. As imposing as the Grade II-listed Victorian home it is attached to, the structure, with a jaw-dropping vaulted ceiling, measures 34ft by 12½ft and has two sets of French doors that open onto a rear terrace. From here, some of the 3½ acres in which the property sits can be savoured, as well as the glorious Kent Downs National Landscape beyond. Built in 1854, Mountfield House, which has four reception rooms and eight bedrooms over three floors, contains myriad historic details, from elegant stone-mullioned glazing and moulded doorways to soaring ceilings adorned with fine cornicing and original fireplaces. The garden includes a swimming pool and tennis court. Hernhill is the nearest village, and Canterbury is only seven miles away. *Strutt & Parker (01227 473700)*

↑ **Berkshire, £2.6 million**

Any house hunters who love a touch of Arts-and-Crafts style, but with 2020s comforts, will no doubt find plenty to please them at Stubbs Hill House near Binfield. This imposing four-bedroom property was built in 2010 and totally renovated in 2023, and it boasts a timber-frame conservatory termed the Oak Room. This measures 21ft by 16½ft, links to the generously sized kitchen and features a spectacular vaulted ceiling and equally impressive views over the farmland beyond; a place where anyone would be happy to wind down at sunset after a hard working day. Stubbs Hill House, which sits in almost three-quarters of an acre, has a distinctly rural feel and yet central London can be reached by car in only 50 minutes (traffic permitting), whereas the commuter stations of Bracknell, Twyford, Ascot and Maidenhead are short drives away. *Knight Frank (01344 293153)*

← **Cambridgeshire, £1 million**

'Bramble Cottage enjoys a rare balance of tranquillity and accessibility, making it a truly special place to call home,' say the sellers of this part-thatched, four-bedroom period home that's thought to date back to the 1600s. Residents in those days wouldn't have found it so spacious, for it was extended in the 1930s, then again in the 1980s, and benefits today include not one, but two wooden glazed extensions, both of which lead into the garden. One of these is currently employed as a gym—although the new owners could easily change its use—and the other forms a part of the light-filled open-plan kitchen. Here the painted solid-wood cabinetry (in subtle hues of grey and blue) provides a contrast to the exposed beams and brickwork. Bramble Cottage sits in a little over half an acre. The village of Sawtry, a short drive from Huntingdon and Peterborough, offers a good range of amenities, including a butcher's, newsagents and post office. *Fine & Country (0330 333 1060)*

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Asymmetric thinking

The garden of a contemporary home in the Chilterns, Oxfordshire

Understanding the language of the house was the key to creating a garden that would complement it, reveals **Tiffany Daneff**

Photographs by Rachel Warne

WHEN you visit a garden or look at pictures of gardens, there's often a double border of lavender on either side of the path leading up to the house with bay trees in pots beside the front door,' observes the owner of this striking contemporary house in Oxfordshire. 'That was no use to us: this is an asymmetric building and we needed a garden that would complement that.'

With rare serendipity, the ideal person to help was working in a neighbour's garden. Angus Thompson, a garden designer based in Oxford, had spotted the Modernist house that was then —in 2015—being built on the other side of the hedge from where he was standing. Although he had never done anything of the sort before, Mr Thompson was so impressed by the nascent structure that he contacted the architect John Pardey, whose sign was displayed outside.

'The garden does not dominate the strong architecture'

The owners had already had the garden cleared of various sheds and outbuildings, not to mention many overgrown shrubs and trees, but they were looking for advice on how to design the steeply sloping plot in such a manner as to match their new home. Keen plantsmen, they had long been inspired by the European New Perennial Movement that became popular in Britain in the 1990s. Since moving here, they had been visiting gardens such as Scampston Hall in North Yorkshire and Broughton Grange in Oxfordshire to learn more about the grasses and perennials such planting schemes favoured. Unable to resist the plants they saw, they had bought many and were holding them in temporary beds until the garden was ready to plant them out.

They had commissioned rough plans from two designers. Unfortunately, neither worked with the modern lines of the house, so the owners were wondering where to turn next. This was the state of play when Mr Thompson got in touch. As luck would have it, he thrives on such projects and his proposal was exactly what they were looking for. 'His was,' the owner says today, 'the only design that spoke the same language as the house. It immediately felt right.'

From the top of the garden, which now falls away in two grassed terraces towards the →

Preceding pages: **The lines of the garden are drawn from the building's cruciform shape and strong axes.** *Left:* **The terrace wraps around the house with vase-pruned amelanchier underplanted with *Hakonechloa macra* 'Nicholas' to divide the space**

house sitting in a slight depression below the main lawn, it's clear to see why. The garden does not dominate the strong architecture, but picks up its cruciform shape and follows the same strong axes. A simple ornamental pond divided by a sculptural hand-chipped piece of basalt anchors one side of it. Clean lines of broken yew hedging echo the low wall that extends from the house on the other, as does the avenue of vase-pruned amelanchier on the top terrace. The stone-flagged terrace around the house is larger than had been intended, as it contains the overflow from the ground-source heat pump cleverly disguised by breaking up the space with planting squares of amelanchiers, each underplanted simply and effectively with the grass *Hakonechloa macra* 'Nicholas'.

> 'This is a garden where the planting is always being reassessed'

Looking up from the stone terrace towards the line of young silver birches at the top of the garden, one experiences a lovely sense of calm. This is partly because the lawn affords breathing space before the gaze settles on the planting that flows around its perimeter. It is also because the sum of the parts add up to a satisfying whole, a result of taking the dimensions for the evergreen structure and hard landscaping from the house. There are other subtle elements at play here: the pond jumps from the flagged terrace to the lawn and it, in turn, is balanced by the extension of the amelanchier avenue linking the top to the main lawn. Yes, the design is underpinned by harmonious geometry, but, more importantly, Mr Thompson successfully provided a garden for a young and growing family, with space on the lawn for football, a trampoline and plenty of running around. At the same time, he incorporated a sinuous run of planting beds that offers plenty of space for the new perennials, as well as a separate productive garden.

The kitchen garden and its Hartley Botanic greenhouse are set against the side wall, where the cut flowers and vegetables are sheltered. This position also allows the island beds that curve around the outer edge of the main lawn to become the main focus of the garden. In summer, the loosely structured perennials can be seen from everywhere in the garden, as well as from the house.

Keeping the flowerbeds in good order is pretty much a full-time job, as Mr Thompson warned the owners when they said they were keen to take care of the planting. To make it easier in the first season after the garden was laid out, he had recommended sowing the beds with a mix of wildflowers from Pictorial Meadows. These were then replaced with the perennials that had been biding their time in the greenhouse and holding beds. A classic combination of reliable herbaceous perennials, they include, in spring, little dark iris paired with the deep-purple *Geranium phaeum* and complemented by the bronzy-brown puffs from the emerging fronds of *Foeniculum vulgare* 'Purpureum', all offset by zingy euphorbias—a palette inspired by Andy Sturgeon's Chelsea show garden of 2005. Come high summer, the island beds are easily making head height with ornamental grasses, such as *Miscanthus*, and stalwart perennials, including eupatorium and echinacea. On the day COUNTRY LIFE visited, a barrowful of plants in pots was standing by, waiting for space to be found. This is a garden where the planting is always being reassessed and the pleasure comes not only from enjoying the view when eating breakfast on the terrace, but from gardening—and always being ready to try out new plants and experimenting with new planting combinations.

Facing page: **A bridge across the pond leads to the beds of perennial planting that sweep up and around the lawn.** *Above:* **Spires of purple *Salvia nemorosa* 'Caradonna' in the foreground of the perennial planting that includes pale-pink echinacea and orange heleniums**

Horticultural black book

- The big amelanchiers came from Deepdale Trees, Bedfordshire (www.deepdale-trees.co.uk)
- The terrace was laid with flags of flamed basalt, widely available
- The large piece of hand-picked basalt dividing the top from the lower pond was chipped by hand on site
- Instant meadow turf and seeds were ordered from Pictorial Meadows, South Yorkshire (www.pictorialmeadows.co.uk)
- The paths between the vegetable beds are lined with cropped black basalt setts, which do a good job of keeping down the weeds. They came from CED Stone, Essex (www.cedstone.co.uk)
- The greenhouse is from Hartley Botanic, Greater Manchester (www.hartley-botanic.co.uk)

Alan Titchmarsh

Slowly does it

'PATIENCE,' said granny, 'is a virtue.' The trouble is that such a virtue is in short supply in today's world of instant gratification, even in the garden. Observe the look on the face of that soul to whom you explained that it will be three years before they can cut asparagus from those newly planted crowns. Or the crestfallen expression of the garden designer's client who is assured that a tree no taller than they are will establish itself much faster—and more happily—than one which is 10ft or 20ft tall. As for sowing seeds…

Wait for a new garden to reveal its treasures, such as this *Rhododendron* 'Loder's White'

A gardening friend who is the same age as me (mid seventies) has been described by those who know him as 'a man in a hurry'. Having just taken on a new 1½-acre garden myself, I understand that feeling, but I want to do things properly. We moved in during early December—leaves had fallen, trees and shrubs and perennials (if there are any) are dormant. I am, as yet, not fully aware of the potential of my new charges, although keen to get cracking.

This is rhododendron country and my acre of woodland, dense with hybrids that were planted in the first half of the 20th century, is overgrown and overshadowed. Scots pines, oaks and tall, spindly birch trees tower over 15ft-high pieris and 10ft camellias. There are several arbutus trees languishing in the shade cast by the oaks and pine—their branches 20ft tall, but sinuous, thinly clad in foliage and questing high and wide into the air like the tentacles of a distressed octopus. They could be cut back, but that will not improve their overall habit. Should I keep one or two and fell the rest to allow room for youngsters?

> 'Oh, the joy of pushing a spade into sandy earth'

Many of the rhododendrons have turned into trees—bare at the base with a scant and lofty canopy competing with other overgrown shrubs (thorny berberis are definitely for the chop)—but, until spring comes, I have no idea if many of them are capable of flowering.

Some will have to go, but which? Others could simply be cut back. I need to make space for new varieties, which fills me with excitement, having gardened on chalk for the past 40-odd years. You see my problem; the anticipation is palpable, but wholesale clearance would deprive me of some potentially beautiful and reinvigorated specimens. Selective culling is the answer, but, until April, May and June, I will not get a feel for which plants have the potential to rejuvenate when some of the geriatric birches are felled and the crowns of the oaks are lifted a little to allow in more light. Therein lies the conundrum: when to crack on and when to leave well alone—for just a little longer.

Mercifully, there are areas where I can get stuck in—making new beds around the terracing at the rear of the house. Oh, the joy of pushing a spade into sandy earth when I have been used to chalk, clay and flint. Ground that would once have taken me two hours to turn over can be cultivated in a fraction of that time, although I am conscious of the need for masses of organic soil enrichment to hang on to moisture come the warmer, drier weather.

New gardens possess so many challenges. I am monitoring the path of the sun—at its lowest at this time of year—so that plants which require sun or shade can be catered for. I have found the best place for a greenhouse and acquired the planning permission I need in this conservation area. (Living in terrain that is designated a National Landscape has to be a plus, but it brings with it a number of planning restrictions, which I know are in everybody's interests).

The style of garden here—around a modern, long, low dwelling with white-rendered walls and black-framed windows and doors—requires a different approach to that surrounding the mellow brick Georgian farmhouse we left behind. It would be churlish (and rather unadventurous) to re-create the garden I planted there over the space of 23 years in this new setting. My elaborate terracotta urns and pots are less suited to this scenario, but my lead tubs pick up the colour of the slate on the roof and look sleek and in tune with the pale ceramic terracing.

Wish me luck in my new venture. I'll try to be patient—and I'll keep you posted.

Horticultural aide-mémoire

Pot up cuttings

Those shrub cuttings that were taken last September will now be ready for potting. It is always wise to pot them in lengthening days. Choose 3in pots for the first, and perhaps only, potting. Organise your bench and drop a small amount of potting compost in the pot. Remove the cutting from the tray, stand it on the compost and, with easy dexterity, fill more compost around it to the brim, keeping it at the same level as it was in the tray. Tap the pot on the bench to settle the compost, label and set it aside for watering. **SCD**

***Chatsworth: The gardens and the people who made them* by Alan Titchmarsh (Ebury, £35) is out now**

Next week Iris

Jonathan Buckley; Alamy

David Salisbury

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Kitchen garden cook Rhubarb

by Melanie Johnson

Rhubarb and almond streusel traybake with blood-orange whipped cream

Ingredients
Serves 6–8

250g unsalted butter, room temperature
250g golden caster sugar
4 large eggs
200g self-raising flour
100g ground almonds
1tspn almond extract
400g rhubarb, cut into bite-size chunks
1 blood orange, zest of

For the streusel

100g cold butter, cubed
125g plain flour
60g Demerara sugar
50g flaked almonds

For the blood-orange cream

300ml double cream
2tbspn icing sugar
1 blood orange, zest and juice

Method

1 Preheat your oven to 160˚C fan/180˚C/350˚F/gas mark 4 and line an oven tray with a sheet of greaseproof paper.

2 Beat the butter and sugar together until pale and fluffy and then add the almond essence and the eggs, one at a time, beating well in between each addition. Fold through the flour and ground almonds until thoroughly combined. Pour into the prepared baking tray and then scatter with the rhubarb pieces and blood-orange zest.

3 Make the streusel topping by simply adding the butter, flour and sugar to a bowl and rubbing together with your fingertips until clumps form. Scatter over the rhubarb, followed by the flaked almonds, then bake for 40–45 minutes or until golden.

4 Remove the traybake from the oven and cool in the tin.

5 Prepare the blood-orange cream by whipping the double cream until soft peaks form. Heat the sugar and blood-orange juice and zest in a small saucepan until it becomes thickened and syrupy. Leave the mixture to cool a little before folding the warm syrup through the cream.

6 Serve the rhubarb traybake warm, with the whipped cream on the side.

Another idea with rhubarb

Rhubarb and rose compôte on pistachio fool

Cut 400g of washed and trimmed rhubarb into bite-size pieces and add to a saucepan with 75g of caster sugar and a teaspoon of rose water. Simmer until bubbling and then reduce the heat and cook for 8–10 minutes. Whip 400ml of double cream to soft peaks and fold through four tablespoons of pistachio paste (available in good supermarkets) and 50g sieved icing sugar. Divide between serving glasses or spoon into a single bowl and chill. When ready to serve, spoon the rhubarb onto the pistachio fool, then scatter with extra chopped pistachios and a few rose petals to make it pretty.

Melanie Johnson

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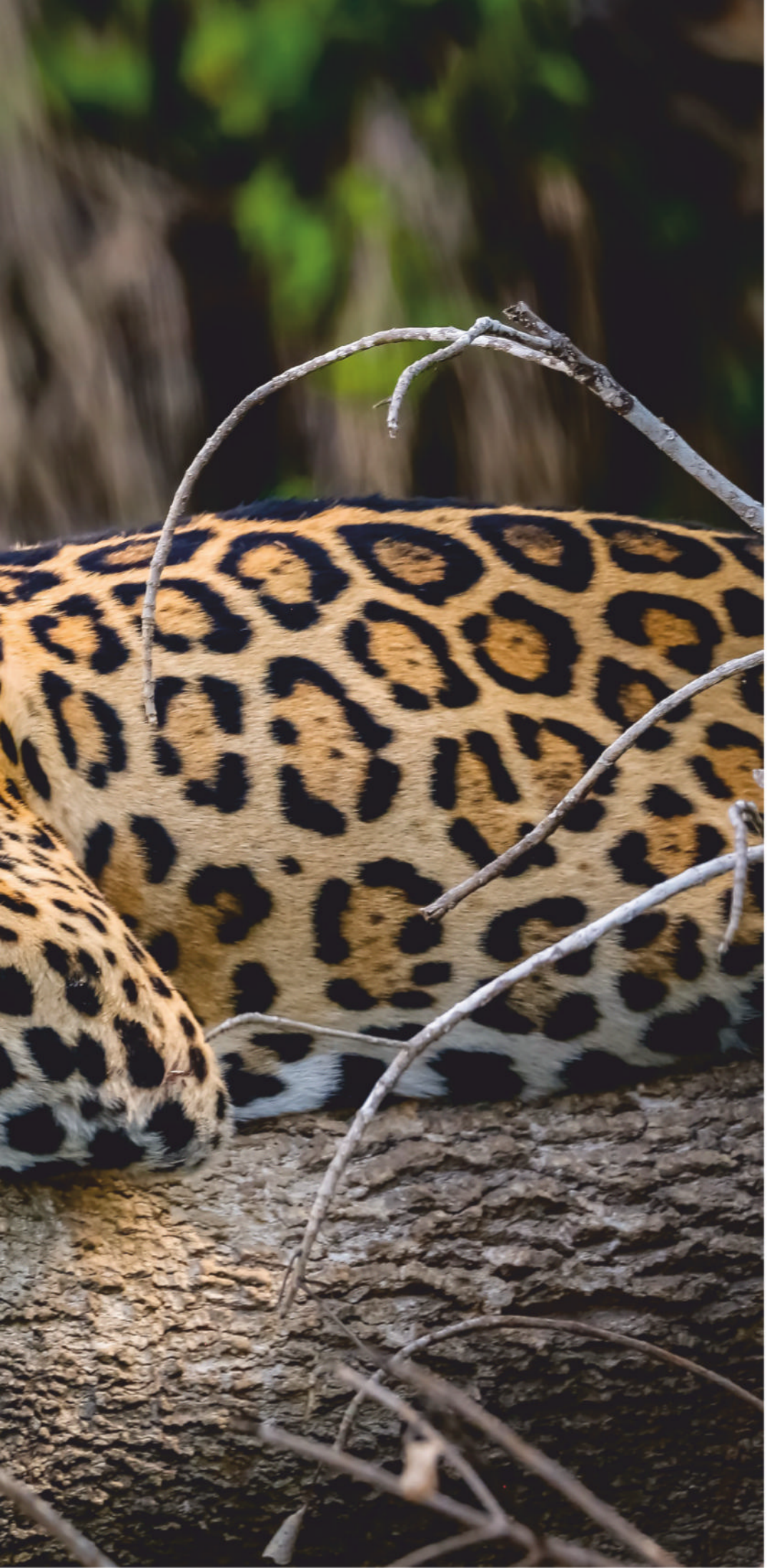
The writing's on the forest walls

On a journey through the Pantanal in Brazil, **Kate Eshelby** questions what will happen to the wider world if we don't learn to take conservation seriously



IT'S dusk when we're stopped in our tracks by a giant anteater—an animal so curious that it seems to teeter somewhere between reality and imagination. We—and the giant anteater, with its elongated nose and sweeping tail, plus a baby draped across its back—are in the golden grasslands of Brazil's Pantanal, the world's largest tropical wetland.

I'm travelling with my husband and two children, visiting three of the country's most wildlife-rich, yet threatened ecosystems, each home to a pioneering conservation project. We're starting at Caiman Lodge inside the Caiman Ecological Refuge, a space the size of the New Forest where low-impact cattle farming exists hand in hand with conservation. Ranches are common here—there are as many as 2,500 and the Pantanal is home to nearly eight million cattle—as are the *pantaneiros*, Brazil's cowboys, who ride out across the seasonally flooded plains (South America's answer to the Okavango Delta). The lodge has 18 suites decorated with cowskin rugs on stone floors, animal-patterned cushions and hammocks strung around a central courtyard. Outside, a group of capybaras, the world's biggest rodents, lounge by a lake. They are so improbable in scale that I feel as if I've slipped into *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*. This seems fitting in a place such as Brazil, which few can describe without mentioning its size. Indeed, when I began planning this trip, I was slightly daunted by its magnitude. It's vast—the world's fifth-largest country.

> 'Capybaras are so improbable in scale I feel I've slipped into Alice's Wonderland'

To reach Caiman, we fly from Rio de Janeiro, the former capital, to Campo Grande via São Paulo (travel can be gruelling here) before embarking on a four-hour car journey. Brazil is a land of abundance and diversity. Despite this, it's also a country where many lack the basics and it struggles to balance development with conservation. Since the Portuguese arrived in the 16th century, people have poured in: mining minerals, felling timber and razing forests for soya farms that stretch as far as the eye can see, most exported for pig feed. Beyond the Pantanal, cattle farming →

The majestic jaguar is seen as a threat to cattle, but efforts are ongoing to impress upon farmers the big cat's tourism draw

Hitching a ride: a baby giant anteater clings to the back of its mother as she explores the grasslands of southern Brazil's Pantanal, the planet's largest tropical wetland

is intensive, dominated by big corporations, with mile upon mile of land cleared for herds—in stark contrast to the sustainable methods long practised here.

Roberto Klabin, Caiman's founder and CEO, is slowly demonstrating to neighbouring farmers that tourism can equal prosperity and that jaguars, although occasionally a risk to cattle, are worth more alive than they are dead. He works with an NGO called Onçafari, whose mission to preserve the country's jaguars and maned wolves involves habituating the animals to vehicles. The ability to view and study them is vital to their long-term survival.

> 'Guira cuckoos are the punks of the Pantanal with their bad-boy hairstyles'

Early one morning, Bruno Sartori, an Onçafari guide with a *Lord of the Rings* map tattooed on his arm, collects us. 'This is my backyard,' he says proudly, raising a VHF antenna to catch the signal emitted by the collared cats. 'When we began our work in 2012, we saw only 35 jaguars a year; now, we see 1,000. We're proving to farmers, through autopsies, that many cattle deaths aren't caused by jaguars, but by snakebites, lightning or poisonous plants.' Wildlife refuges are no good if they work in isolation—animals need to wander freely from one place to another, so Mr Klabin and Caiman staff's work to build a huge ecological corridor, by joining forces with neighbours, is important.

Suddenly, we spot them—a big cat and her cub, resting in the shade of a tree. We pause to admire them. Her coat is patterned with black rosettes; her physique is powerful. We're the only ones here. Further north, around Porto Jofre, crowds of boats surround any jaguar prowling the river banks.

Other days follow a rhythm. We depart early in the morning for a game drive with Mauricio Abib, our guide and a trained biologist, among armies of Barbie-pink trumpet trees. We spend the afternoons taking it easy in the heat around the lodge's swimming pool and the evenings on more game drives. We see the red-collared jabiru, America's largest flying bird, chaco chachalacas—try saying that after a couple of caipirinhas—dainty 'Jesus birds', which look as if they can walk on water, and guira cuckoos, the punks of the Pantanal with their bad-boy hairstyles. Another extraordinary species is the rufous hornero, the nests of which resemble miniature mud houses, moulded onto branches. After dark, we spy ocelots, crab-eating foxes and, to the delight of my sons, tarantulas. Then, in the light of Mr Abib's torch, appear the eyes of hundreds of caimans, glinting back at us like distant city lights.

Caiman is also the base for a research project on the endangered hyacinth macaw—the world's biggest flying parrot. They will only reproduce in the manduvi tree, so tasks include installing artificial nest boxes in the right places, and feed almost exclusively on the nuts of two palms, the acuri and the bocaiúva. There are plenty of them here, pairs flying in beautiful unison, their long wings and tails outstretched like bright blue crosses. When they come to rest in the trees they shriek and clatter like old women gossiping.

Our next destination is Cristalino Lodge, which is situated in a patch of primary forest in the southern Amazon larger than Paris, France. It is owned by Vitória Da Riva Carvalho whose father first came to these parts in 1976 to harvest cocoa, Brazil nuts and guarana. 'In the 1990s, when I flew over the

The vast plains of the Pantanal are home to almost eight million cattle, corralled by the local cowboys, or *pantaneiros*

Amazon, I began to see less green, which is why I decided to buy this virgin forest, to protect it,' she says. 'The idea was always conservation; tourism followed as a way of financing it.' The low-impact lodge invites guests to immerse themselves in the forest as they learn about the Cristalino Foundation, which unites scientists from around the world and continues to discover new species. 'We're at 17% deforestation now,' Ms Da Riva Carvalho says, a note of despair in her voice. 'If we reach 20%, we'll see savannah. There will be less rainfall. This is a problem for all the world.' The Amazon produces 'flying rivers': vast currents of vapour—transpiration from the trees—that carry more fresh water each day, west to the Andes, than the river itself. The vapour is then released, as rain, across the continent.

We fly to Alta Floresta airport, then drive for an hour—past soya farms and swathes of deforestation—before boarding a boat for a 30-minute jaunt up the Cristalino River, a tributary of the Amazon. Cristalino's reserve is now bordered by a state park, created after conservationists highlighted the importance of the surrounding forest; without Ms Da Riva Carvalho's foresight, this whole wilderness would be farmland. As we approach the simply decorated lodge, I ask about our chances of encountering tapirs, Brazil's largest land animal. Moments later, we spot one, eating; its hooked nose is distinctive and its mane so neat it looks as if it's just returned from the hairdresser. The lodge has a library of books, to be enjoyed on a floating platform and sunbeds by the river's edge. I'm lying on one of them one afternoon when a red-capped cardinal bird lands next to me. On another day, we watch as capuchin monkeys play in a banana tree. One of them grabs a fruit and peels it exactly as a human would. The meals are delicious and use myriad ingredients from the forest: catfish carbonara with cashew leaves, honey-caramelised tambaqui and plantain puree and açai. Days are primarily spent aboard a boat on the river. →

The endangered hyacinth macaw, the world's biggest flying parrot, needs a very specific habitat to thrive

We encounter green ibis—they have a tell-tale explosion of emerald sparks on their neck—sunbitterns and neotropical otters, including a male with no table manners aggressively devouring a fish. The river is flanked by golden beaches: 'The Amazonian Copacabana,' says Rafael Ferraz, our guide, as we stop at one for a swim in the crystalline shallows.

Sometimes, we swap the boat for a smaller type of craft, kayaks, and paddle downstream or embark on guided walks through the forest. Blue morpho butterflies, the size of dinner plates, dance around us and white ghost bats shelter, upside down, underneath palm leaves. On the trunk of a dragon's blood tree, its sap a rich red colour, termites are busy building a covered runway ('to avoid the light,' says Mr Ferraz). In the tree canopy, endemic spider monkeys, aware of our presence, turn their gleaming white faces towards us. 'They're endangered, which shows how successful these conservation areas are,' he says. Brazil nut trees are protected by Brazilian law, so they're often spotted standing entirely alone in acres of sparse farmland. 'They're symbolic of the futility of conserving only fragments of forest,' says Mr Ferraz. 'They need the rest of the forest biota. Only the agouti, for instance, can crack open a Brazil nut.'

Deep in the confines of the forest, the lodge has constructed a tower about 164ft tall. We climb up it to look out across the Amazon, the sky studded with toucans, tanagers and parrots. 'Most of the colourful birds live in the canopy,' says Mr Ferraz. 'Everything can see you, so you may as well show off.'

> 'A female maned wolf crosses the road, as graceful as a ballerina stepping onto the stage'

The final stop of our trip is miles from any town and reached by a long, red-earth track that cuts through the Cerrado, one of Earth's most biodiverse (and imperilled) savannahs. We settle into Pousada Trijunção, an intimate eco-lodge cocooned deep in the 81,000-acre Trijunção Private Reserve—conserved land owned by media mogul José Roberto Marinho. The former farmhouse is now decorated with sculpture, big terracotta urns and decorative pools and our room is actually an entire house, with two jacuzzis and a verandah overlooking the hush of the Cerrado. In the garden, black-tufted marmosets, one of the world's smallest monkeys, swing nimbly through trees. Members of Onçafari also operate here, although their focus is on maned wolves—the supermodels of the savannah. Their pencil-thin legs are longer than those of any other canids and they're found only in South America. When we're exploring, a female crosses the road ahead of us, as graceful as a ballerina stepping onto the stage. 'They're vital to this landscape,' says Maria Sternberg, our guide. 'By eating fruits and dispersing the seeds, they maintain biodiversity. They're the gardeners of the Cerrado.'

Towards the end of our trip, Vinny Vianna, another guide, receives a radio call alerting him to the fact that a maned wolf has been captured for collaring. We race to watch—a rare privilege. Her tongue lolls as she wakes from sedation, her long legs wobbly, like delicate flower stems quivering in the wind. She rises, unsteadily, and I wonder when we will all wake up to the reality of what happens if we fail to preserve places such as these. The forest fires are warnings enough—none of this is imagined.

Dehouche, a Brazil-based tour operator, can organise similar itineraries with a focus on personalised, high-end service, even in off-the-beaten-track locations (www.dehouche.com)

Family line: a female capybara—the world's largest rodent—leads her young across a lagoon off the Paraguay River in southern Brazil

Getty; Wim van den Heever/Nick Garbutt/naturepl.com; Alamy

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Rychard Grafton & Edward Whitchurch.
Cum priuilegio ad imprimendum solum.
1539.

This chapytre of the first tractate sheweth who fonde first the playe of the Chesse Capitulo ij
This playe fonde a philosopher of thozyent Whyche was named in calde Eyerses or in greke philemei tor Which is as moche to say in englisshe as he that louyth Justyce and mesure / And this philosopher was renomed gretly among the grekes and them of Athenes Whyche were good clerkys and philosophers also renomed of their connyng / This philosopher was so Just and treWe that he had leuer dye / than to lyue longe and be a fals flaterer With the sayde kyng / For Whan he beheld the foul & syn/ful lyf of the kyng / And that no man durst blame hym

Left: **In Caxton's footsteps: *The Byble in Englyshe*, published in 1539 by Richard Grafton and Edward Whitchurch.** *Above:* **Bold move: *The Game of Chess* by Jacobus de Cessolis, printed by Caxton in 1483**

Read the fine print

When William Caxton opened Britain's first printing press 550 years ago, he helped the country form a shared language and literary culture, as a new exhibition reveals

GERMANY changed the course of English culture. Had William Caxton never spent time in Cologne, he may have never introduced printing to Britain 550 years ago—and never published the books that went on to become the bedrock of English literary identity. Bringing home what he had learned abroad, he allowed his country to build a shared knowledge, stories and language, as a forthcoming exhibition at London's Senate House Library shows.

Caxton was born in about 1420 in the Weald of Kent, a land that Edward III had tried to turn into a centre for the cloth trade some decades earlier by inviting Flemish merchants to come and settle. In his teenage years, Caxton was apprenticed to the mercer's guild, after receiving an education for which he thanked his parents in the prologue to his translation of *Charles the Great*: 'I am bounden to praye for my fader and moders soules that in my youthe sette me to scole, by whyche, by the suffraunce of God, I gete my lyvyng.' In 1446, he moved to Bruges, in what then was the Duchy of Burgundy and is now Belgium, where he later set up his own business.

By his own account, he spent 'XXX yere for the most parte in the contres of Braband, flandres holand and zeland', even serving, in the early 1460s, as governor of the English Nation of Merchant Adventurers. Amid fraught commercial relationships between his adopted home and the country of his birth, in 1464 Caxton was one of the men tasked by Edward IV to act as his 'especial ambassador' at the Burgundian court. It's no surprise, then, that when Charles the Bold—having succeeded his father, Philip the Good, as Duke of Burgundy in 1467—stipulated a treaty with England that included marriage to the English king's sister, Margaret of York, the trusted mercer would become part of her circle.

It is Margaret that Caxton credited for pushing him to complete a translation 'out of frenshe in to englisshe' of Raoul Lefèvre's *Recueil des histoires de Troye*. His labours had taken more than three years, during which he had come close to throwing in the towel, had the Duchess not 'comanded [him] straytly to contynue and make an ende of the resydue than not translated'. One of Caxton's biographers, Norman Blake, suggested that the good mercer may have undertaken the translation because he had already decided to branch out into the printing business and that the reference to Margaret's backing may have been a canny move to make his books more attractive to buyers. Certainly, once his *magnum opus* was finished, he wasted little time in

Senate House Library, University of London; Alamy; Bridgeman Images

finding a way to distribute it. By the time he committed the last word to paper in July 1471, he was living in Cologne, which in the mid 1460s had embraced the printing press invented some two decades earlier by Johannes Gutenberg. There, Caxton became the partner of a local printer, Johannes Veldener, and together they published Bartholomaeus Anglicus's *De proprietatibus rerum*, providing the English mercer with an invaluable opportunity to learn the ropes of the trade.

When Caxton returned to Bruges in 1472, he took along a printing press, Veldener himself and probably the man that would become his foreman (and successor) in England, Wynkyn de Worde. Together, in either late 1473 or early 1474, they published Caxton's translation of the *Recueil*, *History of Troy*—the first book ever printed in the English language. A second one soon followed, *The Game and Playe of the Chesse*, although the majority of the books they published at the time was in French, possibly because Caxton also continued to operate as a merchant and a diplomat, which may have curtailed his time for translations. In 1476, however, everything changed: he returned to England, press in tow, set up shop in Westminster and publishing became his main concern. He started with *The Canterbury Tales*—a fitting choice for the first English book to be printed on English soil. After that, and before his death in about 1492, came some 100 other titles, including the Bible, classical works and chivalric romances.

His motives, explain Karen Attar and Michael Durrant, co-curators of the Senate House exhibition, were largely commercial: 'He identified an unmet market for vernacular print and selected texts already successful in manuscript.' Yet—or perhaps because of this, considering that the savvy Caxton systematically cultivated his public, as Russell Rutter noted in *Studies in Philology* in 1987—the

A Regency imagining of Caxton's portrait. Beneath are his printer's mark and initials

impact that the mercer-turned-printer had on English culture is undeniable. 'William Caxton was a driving force in the spread of English literature,' say Dr Attar and Dr Durrant. 'Chaucer, Gower, Malory: it was Caxton who first printed them all. For centuries, we knew Malory only through Caxton. It's through him that we know about the knights of the Round Table, about Arthur and Guinevere and Lancelot, about courtly love triangles and chivalric ideals. It was not only Malory, but Caxton's Malory, who inspired T. H. White's *The Once and Future King* and helped to bring the Round Table to life for modern audiences. That's pretty inspirational.'

Because of Caxton—and of the printers that followed in his furrow, who broadened publishing to include music, science and medicine treatises, among others—learning and ideas started spreading across England at an unprecedented scale. Yet perhaps what would have most delighted and surprised the man who had apologised, in the prologue to the *History of Troy*, for his 'brode and rude englissh' was that his press also helped forge the nation's language. 'Caxton's influence on the standardisation of English is really quite complex,' believe the curators. 'Indeed, in the prologues to his books, he often reflects on language, wondering which form of English might be understood by readers in different parts of the country. Would a book printed in London be entirely comprehensible in the north of England? Because print could travel further than manuscript, it compelled early English printers to consider such questions.

> 'Caxton was a driving force in the spread of English literature'

Ultimately, Caxton adopted an East Midlands dialect familiar to readers in and around London. In doing so, he helped lay the groundwork for standardising English spelling and vocabulary, although, as Samuel Johnson's struggles with the language nearly 300 years later remind us, this was ultimately a protracted process.'

In helping to consolidate England's shared literature and language, Caxton planted some early seeds of national identity—but he did so on imported soil: his experiences in Cologne then Bruges, his foreign employees and the materials he sourced in Europe. 'All this,' say Dr Attar and Dr Durrant, 'should serve as a reminder that early English printing emerged from transnational practices, rather than insular ones.'

WEIRD & WONDERFUL

RELENTLESS change shaped the childhood of artist April Young. Born in Cumbria in 1972, she moved homes 19 times before she left school. Braving chaos, with little parental supervision and plenty of spare time on her hands, she found solace in horses, seeking them out wherever she lived. As a 10 year old, she even managed to borrow a pony, which for a brief time became her anchor: when he was reclaimed, she experienced her first true heartbreak. Decades later, already an established artist, she faced personal losses and began keeping a journal, 'a paper boat against the swelling tides of grief'.

Today, she brings together those linchpins of both childhood and adult life in the horse sculptures she shapes from wire skeletons, plaster bandages and paper clay made from her own journals. Her steeds jump in a burst of colour, shine golden under the light or sport colourful butterflies, a symbol of transformation—but also have visible 'stitches' formed from the notebooks' photocopied ring bindings. When she started making her pieces, she intended them as personal therapy, until a friend persuaded her to exhibit them, and the most personal of her sculptures was the first to find a home. 'In that moment, a circle closed: what began as an act of survival became a new artistic language shaped by vulnerability, resilience and transformation,' she says. Some of Ms Young's horse sculptures will be on show at the forthcoming Affordable Art Fair in Battersea Park, London SW11 (March 4–8; www.affordableartfair.com) with the Iona House Gallery.

Beside the seaside

SPITTAL BEACH, in Berwick-upon-Tweed, captured L. S. Lowry's imagination. Following a first visit to the Northumbrian town in about 1935, he returned regularly for more than 40 years, painting not only its streets and buildings, but the many facets of its seascapes: in some, the shore buzzes with a playful stick-like crowd; in others, water and sand are grey expanses dotted with the odd boat, ship or outcrop, but almost devoid of people. It is fitting that Spittal will be both the setting and the means to commemorate the 50th death anniversary, on February 23, of a man who declared himself 'very fond of the sea'. On February 21, sand artist Claire Eason will treat the beach as her canvas to create a massive (80ft by 20ft) image of Lowry, complete with trilby hat and spectacles. The same day will also mark the opening of an exhibition devoted to the artist at The Storehouse, Berwick Barracks, 'Lowry in Berwick' (to March 22; www.maltingsberwick.co.uk), which includes a rarely seen pencil sketch of Spittal (*left*).

Take five: curiosities about dressing tables

IT all started with a box. Full of cosmetic pots and perfume jars, it assisted the beautifying efforts of everyone from the ancient Egyptians to the Elizabethans. In the 17th century, however, it morphed into a piece of furniture with fitted drawers for pots, powders and creams: the dressing table was born.

1. In pre-Restoration Britain, the new piece of furniture was a relatively simple affair, with turned legs supporting the drawers and top covered by a simple cloth ('toilet'). When Charles II and his Court came back, however, they brought along the more sophisticated French and Dutch styles

2. As the 18th century unfolded, the dressing table became 'the indispensable requisite of court representation,' according to *The bedroom from the Renaissance to Art Deco*. In France, François Boucher painted Madame de Pompadour, the mistress of Louis XV, at her *toilette*, brush in a dainty hand, poised to apply rouge to her (already abundantly pink) cheeks. In Britain, Queen Charlotte's dressing table took pride of place in Johan Zoffany's portrait of her with her children (*top right*), her face beautifully reflected in the mirror that sat under a beribboned canopy

3. Thomas Chippendale and, later, Thomas Sheraton and George Hepplewhite all created numerous designs, with the latter featuring—in *The Cabinetmaker and Upholsterers Guide*, the book published posthumously by his wife—'the most complete dressing table ever made'. Under a rectangular top sat a central drawer for writing and two side ones fitted with mirrors and compartments for perfumes, powders and variegated make up. Named Rudd's Table, it may have been linked to Margaret Caroline Rudd, a notorious courtesan and fraudster

4. Perhaps not as ingenious, but rather more opulent was the table (*right*) belonging to Caroline, Duchess of Berry, now at the Louvre in Paris, France. It was made in about 1819 of cut crystal and gilded bronze and the candlesticks that support the central, rotating mirror were decorated with sculptures of Zephyr and Flora

5. The Victorian era increasingly espoused functionality and this also remained the byword for the Arts-and-Crafts Movement, albeit now stripped of excessive adornment and underpinned instead by a new interest in quality of craftsmanship. Meanwhile, abroad, the Art Nouveau dressing table

fully embraced floral motifs, swirls and whimsy—not least in the design created by Catalan master Anton Gaudí (*above right*). The fantastical table he designed for Barcelona's Palau Güell has the mirror perched almost precariously at an angle on the carved supports. Undoubtedly beautiful, but perhaps not the most suited to its purpose

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The golden touch

In a world dominated by mass production, digital life and, increasingly, artificial intelligence, our collective yearning for the unique and the tangible is spearheading a craft renaissance, as **Corinne Julius** discovers

CRAFT has become a buzz word. For the past decade, the profile of the handmade has been rising, even attracting big business, as luxury brands, food and drinks companies extol the talent of their artisans. How to define 'craft', however, is open to debate.

Once celebrated not only as producers of everyday objects, but also as artists, artisans gradually came to be seen as the skilled makers of functional items, who often used traditional materials and forms. Their work, although lauded by William Morris and the Arts-and-Crafts Movement in their rejection of the mass produced, increasingly fell out of favour. Artisans were skilled, yes, but what they did was not considered part of any intellectual debate or significant storytelling. Craft was not art. Today, however, it has a very different status. The thrust now is on using materials and objects to investigate ideas and concepts and to tell meaningful stories about contemporary life. Craft is underpinned by intellectual investigation, powerful narrative and the development of materials and processes—head, heart and hand. 'Contemporary craft is storytelling; about old methods and new materials; about the maker's ideas and heritage,' explains metalsmith Ane Christensen.

As a society, we no longer know how things are made. We do not perform or even witness the alchemy of materials being transformed into objects. We have, as Karl Marx predicted, been removed from the means of production, so the public is now fascinated by the process of making. It's no wonder that luxury brands fall over themselves to imbue their products with the notion of the handmade.

Facing page: **Smooth tactility in *Celtic Vase* by Sean Evelegh.** *Above:* **Frances Priest's geometric *Byzantine V*, *Byzantine VI* and *Byzantine VIII*.** *Left:* **Tasty to touch: Ebony Russell's *Rococo Delight: Poke Pot* evokes intricate sugar icing**

Craft also appeals on a haptic level. Humans are hardwired to interpret the world by touch, yet, for many of us, this is reduced to tapping computer keys and moving a mouse. We miss that sensory input and handmade objects can give it to us. 'In a digital world, we long for the tangible, meaningful and tactile,' suggests Ms Christensen. The lack of that routine stimulation accounts not only for the rise in interest in cooking and the growing number of people attending pottery classes or knitting bees, but in the desire to hold handmade objects. T. F. Chan, the new director of the Craft Council's forthcoming Collect Fair, an international selling exhibition of the best of contemporary craft, now in its 22nd iteration, maintains that: 'As we become increasingly enmeshed in the digital world, craft helps us reconnect with the physical: tactility, material intelligence, →

Above: **Did it grow or was it made? *Cale Coves* by Katie Spragg.**
Right: **Shimmering iridescence in *Tide's Out* by Darrell DesRoches**

the ingenuity of the human hand. Contemporary craft feels particularly compelling as it reframes time-honoured traditions through fresh imagination. It gives us an opportunity to create work that is unmistakably of our time, that future generations can look back on with admiration.'

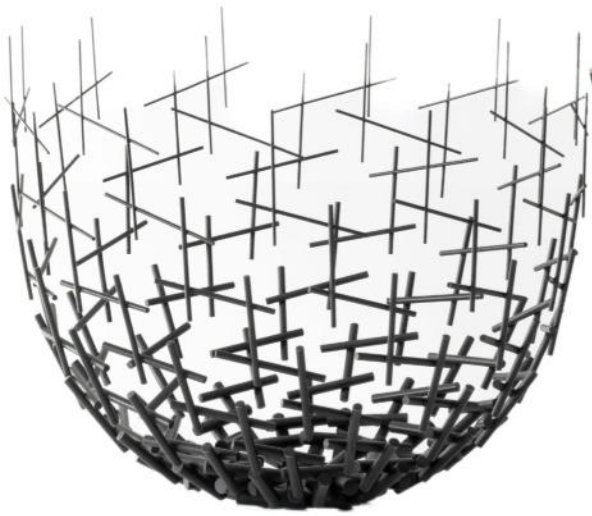
By its very nature, the handmade implies something unique—which, since the dawn of the 2000s, has proven to be a significant draw for those who can afford mass-produced objects, but want to stand out, a trend amplified by social media. The value of provenance has grown and knowing the stories of a piece of work and its maker adds value for the buyer, who becomes a collector.

Grasping that full story has also become ever-more important in a world polluted by fake news, fake truths and—increasingly—artificial intelligence. 'Talking to people involved in tech about AI,' says cultural consultant Jenny White, 'there is a growing sense of distrust. That means that there is a revived desire for authenticity, so craft is seen as real and tangible. Seeing the work in front of you is the antidote to AI and the world we can't control and to which we haven't given consent.'

Craft relates to the human, the individual and the personal. It is high quality, intelligent and beautifully constructed. The work of many of today's makers not only has meaning, but it is shaped by hand, with skill. It looks good, feels good and can be used, sitting on the continuum between fine art and design—and, interestingly, leading fine artists have jumped on the bandwagon to use craft skills in their own work, albeit not always successfully.

Craft is still considerably more affordable than fine art—something Ms Christensen maintains ought to change. '[It] needs to be seen on a level with fine art, as an investment that can hold its value.' That is seemingly the direction of travel: 'Look at the prices of craft objects in auction houses, they're going up and up and up,' notes Simon Fraser, director of the MA Design at Central Saint Martins, London. 'Craft is moving into a collectible, socially acceptable phase.' He sees design shop JW Anderson's establishment of the Loewe Foundation Craft Prize, for 'newness, excellence and artistic merit in modern craft', rewarding the winner with €50,000, as an important influence in making craft desirable. (This year's Loewe Prize exhibition will take place at the National Museum of Singapore from mid May.)

Until prices go up, interesting and affordable work will be on show at the Collect Fair, with some 40 galleries, not only from the UK, but also from Japan, South Korea, Taiwan and China, as well as European contributions



Above: **Ane Christensen creates a magical effect of suspension in *Fading Vessel*.**
Right: **The organic *Overgrown* by Selby Hi**

from Ireland and Poland. 'Craft,' believes Mr Chan, 'is having a moment because it pushes back against our culture of disposability. In this era of abundance and stimulation, people are yearning for artworks and objects that genuinely enrich and elevate our lives—made with care, rich with meaning and able to stand the test of time.'

Corinne Julius is an art critic and the curator of 'Metamorphosis: Craft from Poland' at the forthcoming Collect Fair at Somerset House, London WC2 (February 27–March 1; www.collectartfair.com)

Chic and collect: Japanese lacquer

FEW materials have more meaning or better stand the test of time than lacquer. Masami Yamada, curator of Japanese Art at the V&A Museum, has seen a phenomenal growth in interest in lacquer, not only in Japan and South Korea, but among the wider collecting public. 'When we talk about the history of Japanese lacquer, it has predominantly been about surface decoration. In the 20th century, individual artists started trying to find a new direction in the outer plain lacquer, the pure lacquer surface. They sought to make something meaningful without decoration. In the 21st century, they are increasingly experimenting with form.'

It takes 10 years for a Chinese lacquer tree, *Toxicodendron vernicifluum*, to produce the sap that is then carefully extracted and purified by specialists. In traditional work, there can be 20 layers of lacquer painstakingly applied. The finished objects may be decorated with tiny fragments of shell (*raden*) or sprinkled with metal powder (*maki-e*). Today, artists are making large sculptural vessels in dry lacquer

(*kanshitsu*) using hemp cloth soaked in the refined sap and shaped around specially created moulds. The surfaces are undecorated, with an extraordinary depth of colour that invites touch.

'Making in lacquer is a much slower process compared with many craft media and I think a lot of people are fascinated by that,' says Ms Yamada. 'The time and thought that is put into the making, when we live in such a fast-paced world everywhere—I think there's that aspect that probably resonates with lots of people.'

So intense has been the interest that Ms Yamada is organising 'Urushi Now: Contemporary Japanese Lacquer', a display of more than 30 works at the V&A's Toshiba Gallery, from April 30 for one year. It will include some historical pieces, but chiefly focuses on new works. There are sensuous, almost erotic box forms by Toki Kenji, similarly voluptuous vessels in brilliant red lacquer by Sasai Fumie, dripping red-mouth sculptures by Sotome Haruka and huge curvaceous sculptural stelae in deep black by Tanaka Nobuyuki, as well as geometric containers studded with tiny chips of nacre by Ikeda Terumusa, more organic forms by Yamamura Shin'ya (*left*) and candy-coloured, indented boxes by Uesugi Gakusui.

The glories of lacquer are also on show at the Collect Fair at Somerset House, London WC2, in four galleries. Mono Art and Wajoy from Japan, The Gallery by SOIL from Hong Kong and White Conduit Projects, which will show works co-created by UK-based artists Jane Bustin and Rosa Nguyen, in collaboration with Japanese lacquer master HIROKI.

Tian Khee Siong; Courtesy of Ebony Russell and Cynthia Corbett Gallery; Robert Chadwick/Courtesy of Ruup & Form; Darrell DesRoches/Courtesy of Craft Alliance Atlantic Association; Nicola Tree/Courtesy of Five Gallery; Courtesy of Alveston Gallery Notting Hill; Victoria and Albert Museum

Huon Mallalieu

Fig 1: **A Chelsea vase modelled as boys with a fish, attributed to Willems and left to the Huguenot Museum by Anthony du Boulay**

Fig 2: **A Worcester triple dish in the shape of shells by French ceramicist Jean Toulouse**

Fig 3: **A seal in the form of a hen and chick, produced by Charles Gouyn's St James's Factory in London**

Fig 4: **A silver tea caddy from a set marked for Huguenot goldsmith Eliza Godfrey and Thomas Heming, goldsmith to George III**

Fair-brained schemes

Acceptance in lieu and similar cultural-gift provisions benefit museums, collectors and the public alike

EARLIER this month, I spent a fascinating day at the Huguenot Museum in Rochester, Kent. The occasion was a seminar on the Acceptance in Lieu and Cultural Gifts schemes, prompted by the allocation to the Museum of ceramics and silver from the estate of Anthony du Boulay (1929–2022). There was an impressive turnout, despite delays caused by railway disruption. Speakers covered all aspects, which was important, as these are not 'one size fits all' matters. They were art adviser Anastasia Tennant (Tennant McQuillan), Leanne Manfredi of the V&A Museum and Arts Council, Ruth Cornett of Christie's personal advisory service and Patricia Ferguson, the authority on a range of ceramics, together with Tessa Murdoch, the museum's chair, and Guy Schwinge of Duke's, where du Boulay was a consultant in his 'retirement'. Although the wider aim of the schemes is the same, to pass works of art from private to institutional hands to the advantage of both parties and the Treasury, they operate in different ways and advisers are needed. This applies to museums, as well as private individuals.

The annual report shows that, in 2024–25, the schemes received 32 works of art or interest worth £59.7 million. You do not have to be dead to benefit, as a number of dealers have found, including Sam Fogg with the gift of a 15th-century maiolica apothecary jar to the Ashmolean Museum in Oxford and Adrian Sassoon with an early-19th-century porcelain painter's palette plate to the V&A.

Du Boulay was a lifelong collector rather than—strictly—a dealer. At Christie's, in much earlier days, he spent years on the front counter, where he saw everything and honed his eye to become widely knowledgeable, as well as a world-respected specialist in Oriental and other ceramics. He was a perfectionist in all things. This sometimes irritated his colleagues, as he would proofread their catalogues, as well as his own. When in a 'red mist', his temper was volcanic, but underneath he was one of the

Ros Hodges, Lara Dix, Huguenot Museum

Pick of the week

It is surely time for a reassessment of Sir Thomas Monnington's artistic standing. He has now been half a century dead, which is generally about the time taken by the reputational wheel to revolve from eminence to oblivion to balanced judgement and perhaps even admiration once more. Born in 1902, he trained at the Slade School of Art and then in Rome on a three-year scholarship, marrying there his fellow student Winifred Knights, who, since the 2016 retrospective at Dulwich Picture Gallery, London SE21, is probably better remembered than him. Back in Britain, he made his name with traditional historical murals, notably for the Bank of England and St Stephen's Hall in the Palace of Westminster.

He learned to fly and, shortly before the outbreak of war, he joined the Directorate of Camouflage. It became obvious to him that, in order to be effective in the work of disguising airfields and the like, he needed to be able to observe from the air, but it took until November 1943 to persuade the War Artists' Advisory Committee to give him permission to fly as an Official War Artist, first with a training squadron and then over Germany. Among the exercises he painted were two Fighter Affiliations, where bomber pilots were trained to manoeuvre when attacked by fighters: they are now in the Imperial War and RAF Museums. The latter has just bought two of Monnington's wartime ink-and-graphite sketches, one a preparation for its version measuring 5in by 6in (*top left*) and the other the 4¾in by 6in *Study for Southern England* (*above left*), with trails and dog-fights over Palmeresque fields. They cost £1,968 and £630 at Roseberys—prices that underscore my point that he is due a reassessment.

Post-war, he taught and then returned to murals, but in a calmly modernist geometric manner. There are remarkable ceilings at Bristol City Hall, on the theme of modern science and the splitting of the atom, and a memorial chapel at Exeter University, Devon. He was elected Royal Academy president in 1966 and was responsible for bringing the academy back from fossilisation in the Munnings era. This he managed with diplomacy.

As a boy, I sometimes sailed with his elder brother Meredith, who had a beautiful boat at Orford in Suffolk; could she have been a Bombay Tomtit? He was no artist, but his wife, Kitty, was a good landscape painter and she, too, might be worth discovering.

Ken Howard RA, who died in 2022 just short of his 90th birthday, is still at a high point with his traditional landscapes, beaches, views of Venice and studio interiors. He was a lovely man, but any colleague who paid him a studio visit must have been flooded with envy. I saw only the one in The Boltons, SW10, but the others, in Venice and at Mousehole in Cornwall (seen, *above right*, in *St Clement's Studio*, 1996), will have been just as inspiriting. Those who know only the later work should seek out his powerful 1970s paintings as an artist with the army in Northern Ireland and elsewhere. In recent years, his gallery was Richard Green in Bond Street, W1, where a celebratory exhibition opens on February 25.

kindest of men and generous with his learning and atrocious puns. I miss his postcards commenting on my columns.

Naturally, he thought carefully about the future of his collections, choosing what should go to Winchester, his old school in Hampshire, the Ashmolean and the Huguenot Museum or to auctions. Naturally, too, all was done with an eye to the most advantageous tax position for all parties. He had been a long-standing director of the Huguenot French Hospital almshouses from which the museum sprang and chose his gifts to illustrate the importance of Huguenot craftsmen and entrepreneurs to the development of 18th-century English porcelain and silversmithing.

Among them are a Chelsea vase modelled as boys with a fish **(*Fig 1*)**, attributed to Joseph Willems, a seal modelled as a hen and chick **(*Fig 3*)** from Charles Gouyn's St James's Factory (previously known as 'Girl in a Swing') and a Worcester triple dish modelled as shells **(*Fig 2*)** by Jean Toulouse. The museum has also been allocated du Boulay's silver tea caddy set **(*Fig 4*)** marked for the Huguenot goldsmith Eliza Godfrey and Thomas Heming, who was goldsmith to George III.

Next week **Wallpapers and other shows**

Michael Billington

Time travellers: a mystery from the past is pondered over by characters in the present, in the Old Vic's production of *Arcadia*

Paradise revisited

The late Sir Tom Stoppard's masterpiece is revived and there are great reworkings of Strindberg and a teenage Coward's play

FOR many people, *Arcadia* is Sir Tom Stoppard's finest play. Even if my own preference is for *The Real Thing*, there is no doubt that *Arcadia* is a work of infinite pleasure that constantly yields new meanings. The first time you see it, you are dazzled by its abundant ideas. Watching Carrie Cracknell's revival at the Old Vic, London SE1, I found myself moved by its poetic, elegiac spirit.

As so often with Stoppard, two worlds are juxtaposed. All the action takes place in a Derbyshire country house called Sidley Park. In the scenes set in 1809, we see various amorous couplings, Capability Brown's patterned Arcadian landscape being replaced by a wild Gothic garden complete with hermitage and a young girl, Thomasina, intuitively questioning Newtonian physics. In the present day, a serious scholar, Hannah Jarvis, hoping to identify the recluse who occupied the hermitage, clashes with an arrogant don, Bernard Nightingale, who erroneously believes that, in 1809, Byron was involved in a duel at Sidley Park and was forced to flee the country.

Even that bald summary shows that there is an immense amount going on in the play: order clashes with chaos, classicism with romanticism, historical reality with academic deduction. However, after several viewings, I have begun to grasp how the ideas mesh and interact: Thomasina's preference for the irregularity of the redesigned landscape coincides with her instinctive rejection of the symmetry of traditional physics. I have also realised that this is very much a play about time. Although one of the characters argues that time runs inescapably forwards, the playwright shows that, in the theatre, it can also move backwards and that past and present may finally converge. It is that, as well as the pervasive sense of loss, which makes the play so deeply affecting.

> 'In the theatre, time can move backwards and past and present may finally converge'

I have only one reservation about the new production: because it is played in the round, on a reconfigured Old Vic stage, what Stoppard himself called 'clarity of utterance' is sometimes sacrificed. The performances, however, are very good. Isis Hainsworth captures perfectly the intellectual fervour of Thomasina and Fiona Button the physical ardour of her sensuous mother. Seamus Dillane has just the right air of predestined doom as Thomasina's tutor and Prasanna Puwanarajah deftly evokes the cockiness of fame-hungry academics. The result is a richly satisfying evening and proof that one trip to Stoppard's *Arcadia* is never quite enough.

Manuel Harlan; Matt Hunter; Johan Persson

The rest of this month's plays remind us that love and hate are two emotions never far from each other. The daddy of all such works is August Strindberg's 1900 play *Dance of Death*, which in Sir Richard Eyre's wondrous adaptation and direction is being revived at the Orange Tree, Richmond, TW9. The action is set in a circular tower and shows Edgar, an army captain, and his wife, Alice, still vituperatively entangled after 25 years together; with the arrival of Alice's cousin, Kurt, we realise that each is as evil as the other. Although it sounds grim, it could be seen as the original black comedy; the level of rancour is so extreme that when an appalled Kurt cries 'This is ghastly', the audience bursts into justified laughter.

The great virtue of Sir Richard's production, however, is that it sees that, for all their hatred, Edgar and Alice desperately need each other: there is a telling moment when they instinctively join hands and then break away the second that Kurt notices. I was also struck by how often Strindberg anticipates the work of Samuel Beckett. Alice's question 'Do we know any happy people?' is one that might have come from the great Irishman, as is Edgar's concluding determination to 'rub it out and move on'. I need only add that Will Keen has precisely the right bullet-headed paranoia as Edgar, Lisa Dillon is all kittenish malice as Alice and Geoffrey Streatfeild is a suitably horrified onlooker as Kurt.

The idea of a couple bound together by pain and guilt, as well as more tender emotions, also pervades a startling new play, *Guess How Much I Love You?*, by Luke Norris, which auspiciously opens the 70th season at the Royal Court, SW1. The play is about a young married couple who learn after a 20-week hospital scan that their expected baby has only a 50% chance of survival. In the ensuing scenes, we see how this produces violently mixed emotions, ranging from the extremes of despair to hope. Once again, I can only urge readers not to be put off by the subject matter, but to rejoice in a play that is full of wild humour as well as savage banter and that, in Jeremy Herrin's fast-moving production, is superbly acted: Rosie Sheehy as the volatile wife has an astonishing emotional transparency and Robert Aramayo as the husband is equally impressive in the tenacity of his unflinching love.

Miles Richardson's actor and Terence Frisch's artist clash in *Round About Hogarth*

> 'I urge readers to rejoice in a play that is full of wild humour as well as savage banter'

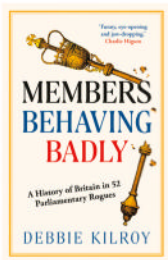
Even the 18-year-old Noël Coward in his first play, *The Rat Trap*, now reimagined by Bill Rosenfield for a new production at Park 200, N4, was drawn to the subject of marital conflict. This precocious, highly watchable play shows that when a male playwright marries a female novelist there is immense difficulty in reconciling their competing egos. The play prefigures a lot of later Coward with its portrait of the high and lows of private lives and the need for the artist to avoid binding commitment. Although I'm not sure I accept Coward's premise that two writers can never successfully cohabit, Kirsty Patrick Ward's production is a pleasure to watch and Ewan Miller and Lily Nichol as the ill-matched pair go at it hammer and tongs.

It is not about marriage, but Gareth Armstrong's *Round About Hogarth* at the Tabard Theatre in Chiswick, W4, recently acclaimed as London Pub Theatre of the Year, is a terrific new play about the unlikely friendship between William Hogarth and David Garrick. The former was a crabby artistic genius, the latter an equable and great actor, but they formed a happy association until Hogarth unwisely trespassed on Garrick's territory. The play is informative, comic, touching and beautifully acted by Terence Frisch as the artist and Miles Richardson as the actor. It shows that even the course of friendship, like that of true love, never did run smooth.

'Arcadia' until March 21 (0344 871 7628); 'Dance of Death' until March 7 (020–8940 3633); 'Guess How Much I Love You?' until February 21 (020–7565 5000); 'The Rat Trap' until March 14 (020–7870 6876); 'Round About Hogarth' until February 21 (020–8995 6035)

***Guess How Much I Love You?* puts audiences at the heart of a young couple's dilemma**

MPs behaving badly is nothing new



Members Behaving Badly: A History of Britain in 52 Parliamentary Rogues
Debbie Kilroy (Elliott & Thompson, £22)

IN the introduction to this morbidly compelling book, the author, a serious historian with a bawdy pen, warns: 'Many of the politicians contained within these pages committed heinous crimes. Some abused animals and children and wives; some perpetrated acts of cruelty and malice upon individuals and groups; some met sticky ends, including at their own hands. And, while there are a few sailors featured here, many more could swear like them—or like Restoration poets.'

Indeed they could. What a surprise to re-encounter the indescribably obscene verse by Sir Charles Sedley (member for New Romney), not seen since school when we history boys delved into the rare books section of the library. Then, however, it was attributed to his friend, the equally dissolute Earl of Rochester (like Sedley, an alumnus of Wadham), who, unsurprisingly, died young of syphilis.

> 'The list of sinners is not, in the majority of cases, without credit and herein lies the moral complexity'

However, Debbie Kilroy is at pains to point out, refreshingly, that she is not 'bringing current opinions down as judgement on the past: there are "crimes" towards which we wouldn't bat an eyelid now, but in the past could lead to imprisonment, maiming or, in extreme cases, execution by way of punishment'; on the other hand, there are things 'which today are considered despicable… [but which] at the time would not even provoke a shrug of the shoulders'. Her rule of thumb is that 'members' behaviour must not only be shocking now, but also in the MPs' own times'.

She is, indeed, generally rather understanding, sympathetic, even indulgent, except where murder is obviously murder. The worst (I think) she says of Sedley, for example, is that he was no gentleman. Of her treatment of Samuel Pepys, chief secretary to the Admiralty and member for Castle Rising and then Harwich, the pupils of his alma mater, Huntingdon Grammar (now Hinchingbrooke School), might take careful note. The school made headlines recently when parents received an email saying that there may be a change to the house system: Pepys House might be renamed, as his 'abusive and exploitative' behaviour towards women 'does not align' with the school's values. The decision, however, would be up to pupils.

William Gladstone is depicted being kicked out over Home Rule in *Away With Him*, but his fixation on fallen women was tolerated

Pepys, concedes the author, was 'what one might call a sex addict' and keen to exploit his position to serve his addiction: 'Mrs Bagwell, for example, was the wife of a ship's carpenter who worked on naval contracts. Over the course of several meetings… she was slowly convinced that submitting to her husband's boss would help further her husband's career.' However, in this transactional arrangement, 'Pepys did at least keep his side of the bargain: he was still helping Mr Bagwell 15 years later'.

Two centuries on, William Gladstone, the prime minister, equally sex-obsessed, but, appalled by his obsession, walked the streets at night in search of fallen women whom he wished to redeem, even bringing some of them back to No 10 for tea and a square meal. It was widely known about, but generally thought to be bizarre rather than deviant. Ms Kilroy thinks it a little of both and no obvious harm came of it. Indeed, indirectly, it may even have helped maintain the Raj in India. The account of Gladstone's 'favourite', the beautiful and clever Laura Bell, and Prince Jung Bahadoor Rana of Nepal, could be straight out of a Flashman novel.

How to tackle that old goat, David Lloyd George, also known as "The Welsh Wizard"? 'His entire life, including the 53 years of marriage with my mother,' she quotes of his disinherited son, 'was involved with a series of affairs with women, some innocent, some romantic, some deeply obsessive, some cynical and worldly, and most of them fruitful.' He was also guilty of insider trading in shares and he lied to Parliament, but, as his son added: 'To portray his life without taking into account this side of his personality is like failing to depict Beethoven's handicap of deafness during the composition of his greatest works.' The author agrees, as do I. Without Lloyd George, I doubt, for instance, that we would have won the First World War or, at the very least, without many more casualties.

Reading Ms Kilroy's lively, well-laid-out, thoroughly entertaining and novel history of the House of Commons over three dynamic centuries, it would be easy to despair of human nature, concluding that the Mother of Parliaments was thoroughly venal and whorish. She is not writing of the 'saints', after all. However, even her eclectic list of sinners is not, in the majority of cases (I think), without credit and herein lies the moral complexity of it all.

Allan Mallinson

Getty

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A rum deal

In the light of the Royal Navy's decision to ban sailors from drinking alcohol for at least two days a week, **Henry Jeffreys** considers the role of hard liquor in the lives of those who serve on the seas

Maritime measures: sailors on HMS *Curacoa* receive their rum ration at sea in 1940

'I'D rather have them three sheets to the wind on occasion than have a mutiny on my hands,' opined Capt Jack Aubrey to the ship's surgeon, Dr Stephen Maturin, when he complained about the crew's drunkenness. Based on the novels of Patrick O'Brian, the 2003 film *Master and Commander: The Far Side of the World* may be a work of fiction, but the historical seafaring attitude towards drink is not.

Yet how the Royal Navy has declined since the heroic times of the Napoleonic Wars. In a bit of jobsworth 'elf and safetyism, it was announced at the end of January that sailors on board ships would be expected to stick to the Government's recommended limit of 14 units. That's about six pints. A week! What's more, ships must have two dry days each week and sailors will not be allowed more than three units a day—about a pint and a half.

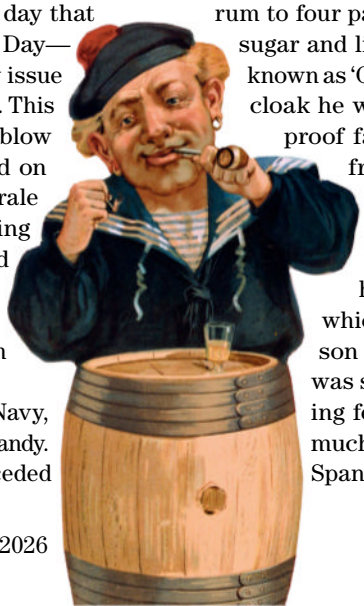
It's tragic to see a great institution brought down by the clipboard-wielding classes, but the rot actually set in 56 years ago when the daily rum ration (about an eighth of a pint) was discontinued—a tradition that had kept Britain safe for hundreds of years.

At 11am on July 31, 1970—a day that became known as Black Tot Day—sailors received their final daily issue of Admiralty blend Pusser's Rum. This dark day was not only a bitter blow to sailors—men who had relied on this nautical nectar to boost morale and ease the pain of unforgiving labour—but it also saw the end of a complex system of purchasing and blending that had evolved over hundreds of years. Navy rum was a rum like no other.

In the early days of the Royal Navy, however, the spirit of choice was brandy. This changed when the Spanish ceded Jamaica to England in 1670. This large Caribbean island produced masses of sugar cane worked by African slaves. The by-product, molasses, was distilled into rum. By 1731, the daily tot had been institutionalised, a tradition that would last 239 years. To ensure the Navy wasn't being cheated, the purser would mix the rum with gunpowder and put a flame to it. If the rum caught fire it was the right strength, dubbed 'proof' (a modern 57% abv). Too weak and it wouldn't light, too strong and it would explode. Proof rum was watered down slightly for the obvious safety reasons.

> 'If the rum caught fire it was the right strength, dubbed "proof"'

With rum this strong, it was a problem keeping the men sober-ish until, in 1740, Admiral Edward Vernon introduced a kind of proto-Mojito. This consisted of one part rum to four parts water with brown sugar and lime juice. Vernon was known as 'Old Grog' because of the cloak he wore made of a waterproof fabric called grogram, from which where we get the word 'grog'. The lime juice in Old Grogram's cocktail helped prevent scurvy, which was part of the reason why the Royal Navy was such an effective fighting force—its sailors were much healthier than their Spanish or French rivals.



Until 1850, sailors would get rum in the morning and evening, but the latter tot ended in 1850. On special occasions extra rations would be issued with the cry: 'Splice the mainbrace!' Not everyone approved, however. Throughout the 19th century, temperance campaigners tried to ban the rum ration, but the Royal Navy held firm.

Oceans of rum were required to defend the British Empire. By the end of the Second World War, there were about 800,000 sailors serving and amazingly, one company, ED&F Man, supplied all the Royal Navy's needs from 1784 to 1970. Rum from all over the Caribbean would land at the aptly named Rum Quay at West India Dock in London E14. From there it would go to the vast naval victualling yard at Deptford in Kent, where it would be aged for two years in a 250,000-gallon vatting system before it was sweetened with caramel and sent out on ships.

The blend would change over time. According to Mark Pietrek and Alexandre Gabriel's book *Exploring 300 Years of Royal Navy Rum and its Techniques*, initially, Barbados dominated, followed by Jamaica, which was in turn superseded by Guyana. Gabriel's company Planteray makes a replica called Mister Fogg Navy Rum after a late employee of ED&F Man. It's blended from Barbados, Trinidad, Guyana and Jamaica rum and aged in the Caribbean and, heretically, France. I'm not sure Capt Aubrey would approve.

Although life at sea would have been hard and dangerous, a tot of rum would have made life a little sweeter. After Black Tot Day, sailors were assured that they would be allowed three beers a day instead. Now even this moderate allowance has been removed. Who'd want to run away to a life at sea these days?

Henry Jeffreys is the author of 'Empire of Booze' (Allen & Unwin, £12.99)

Print Collector; Getty

Bridge Andrew Robson

We return to Herning in Denmark for a last look at the 47th World Championships. The England Open Team—and, similarly, the English Seniors—were eliminated in the quarter-finals to end the home interest.

Talking of home interest, the Danish Open Team defeated USA 2 in the quarter-finals and a powerful Swedish team in the semis. However, the USA 1 team, the team that defeated England in our quarter-final, proved too strong and it was they who held aloft the Bermuda Bowl—with their ranks including the oldest-ever winner Eddie Wold, from Houston, Texas, aged 74.

The Danes had their moments, however—take this board from the final.

Dealer West
Both Vulnerable

	♠ - ♥ 9432 ♦ 105432 ♣ A542	
♠ AQJ943 ♥ 8 ♦ KQ87 ♣ J9	N W ✣ E S	♠ 8652 ♥ Q76 ♦ 96 ♣ K876
	♠ K107 ♥ AKJ105 ♦ AJ ♣ Q103	

South	West	North	East
	1♠	Pass	2♠
3♥	4♠	5♥	Pass
Pass	Dbl	End	

West led the King of Diamonds vs Five Hearts doubled, declarer winning the Ace. At the other table (same auction except for the final double), the US declarer had banged down the Ace-King of Hearts. The Queen didn't fall and he went one down.

Dane Andreas Plejdrup-Meister was not willing to be so committal. Winning the Ace of Diamonds, he returned the Knave. West won the Queen and switched to the Knave of Clubs. Rising with dummy's Ace, he called for the ten of Diamonds, ruffed low and overruffed. He ruffed a Spade, crossed to the Ace of Hearts, ruffed a second Spade, ruffed a fourth Diamond and ruffed his last Spade.

At trick 10, declarer led the winning fifth Diamond. East ruffed (with his remaining Queen of Hearts), but declarer overruffed and led the Queen of Clubs. East won the King but declarer had the last two tricks with his remaining trump and the promoted ten of Clubs. Doubled game made.

Our second deal comes from the semi-finals, where the USA 1 cruised to victory over Belgium, who had surprised everyone by beating many people's favourites, Italy, in the quarter-finals—they trounced them, actually.

Dealer North
East-West Vulnerable

	♠ K9874 ♥ Q42 ♦ KJ98 ♣ 6	
♠ - ♥ 963 ♦ 1052 ♣ AQJ9832	N W ✣ E S	♠ AJ1053 ♥ 5 ♦ A63 ♣ K1074
	♠ Q62 ♥ AKJ1087 ♦ Q74 ♣ 5	

South	West	North	East
		Pass	1♠
2♥	Dbl(1)	4♥(2)	Dbl(3)
Pass	Pass(3)	Pass	

1) Negative—that is, take-out—but not my choice. For me, you either overbid with Three Clubs, or wait and pass.
2) Good pressure bid from the New Yorker, John Hurd.
3) If this is take-out, fine, great. But if so, why is West passing? I think that if West never utters (or types—iPads were used to bid) the word 'Clubs', he is not getting to grips with the hand.

Five Clubs by East-West was easy—indeed, bid and made by the US East-West at the other table. Defeating Four Hearts doubled by even two tricks would represent a loss of eight IMPs. The Belgian East-West allowed Four Hearts to make and that was a double game swing and 15 IMPs to the USA team.

How do you think the defence to Four Hearts should go after West leads a Diamond (as he did)? East wins the Ace and must ask himself the key question: why has my partner not led a Spade?

There can be only one explanation—he hasn't got one. After winning the Ace of Diamonds, East cashes the Ace of Spades and leads the three of Spades, low as a suit-preference signal for the lower-ranking Clubs. West ruffs and trustingly underleads his Clubs to East's King, East giving his partner a second Spade ruff. That's the first five tricks to the defence and, although declarer polishes up the rest, that's two down. Not as good as making a vulnerable Five Clubs, but better than conceding the doubled game.

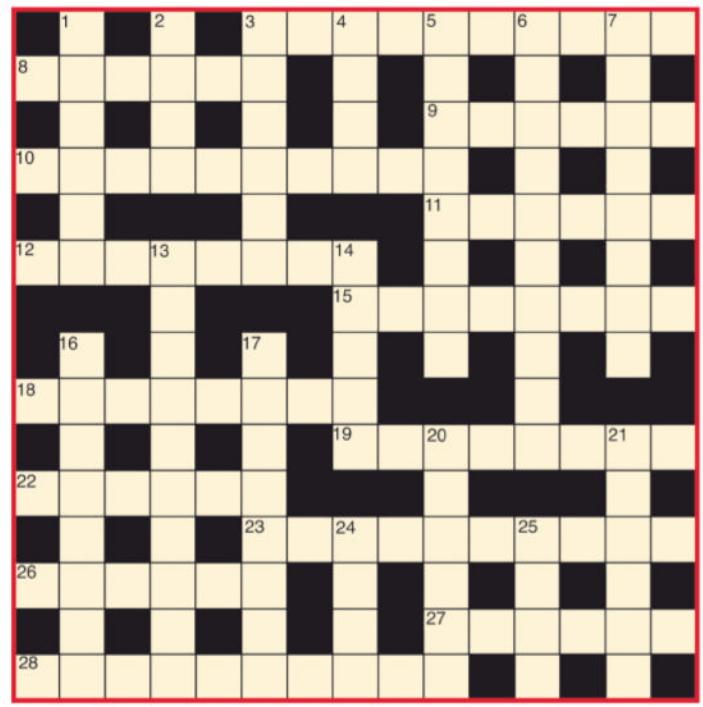
Crossword

A prize of £25 in book tokens will be awarded for the first correct solution opened. Solutions must reach Crossword No 4918, Country Life, 121–141 Westbourne Terrace, Paddington, London, W2 6JR, by **Tuesday, February 24**. UK entrants only

ACROSS
3 Picture in other words by good man is most vague (10)
8 We are in agreement as to corruption (6)
9 Allow Henry to be deadly (6)
10 Go! Not in the same league (4,2,4)
11 Cowardly fellow is truly heartless in an offhand way (6)
12 Duck and trips over spar (8)
15 Splendid way of making noise? (8)
18 I introduce grants for trees (8)
19 Pockets in clothing (8)
22 Vicar before worship (6)
23 Shell out to bet uncle (10)
26 Allow cat parts of fowl (6)
27 Go down and back to rock when lazy (6)
28 Quickly departs as small tick confuses (10)

DOWN
1 Train an emperor (6)
2 Polish expert (4)
3 Snores set off alarm (6)
4 Therefore part of inter-governmental initiative (4)
5 Indifferent to reduction in food (4,4)
6 Influences way Milan side performs (10)
7 Bird to hang around sailor (8)
13 Reduced silver held in deposits (10)
14 Seek way to have meeting (5)
16 While in drink I am back to missing creature comforts (8)
17 Crestfallen that daughter to dismiss writer (8)
20 Lowest flight of birds (6)
21 Rotten what most senior plain-clothes policeman did (6)
24 Colour of a duck (4)
25 Exclude band leader for insult (4)

4918 **TAIT**



SOLUTION TO 4917

ACROSS: 1, Disavows; 5, Neural; 9, Portrays; 10, Stylus; 12, Cantina; 13, Utensil; 14, Loudspeakers; 17, Readdressing; 22, Silicon; 23, Brigand; 24, Leaden; 25, Pitiable; 26, Rakish; 27, Ethylene. DOWN: 1, Depict; 2, Shrink; 3, Vertigo; 4, Ways and means; 6, Extrema; 7, Relished; 8, Listless; 11, Purpose-built; 15, Wrestler; 16, Hallmark; 18, Duchess; 19, Noisily; 20, Gamble; 21, Adhere.

The winner of 4916 is Fiona Walberton, Surrey

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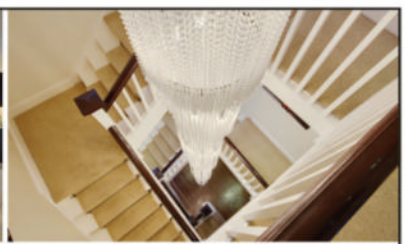

Set on a desirable leafy road in Bournemouth and within a mile of the town centre, this outstanding six-bedroom, six-bathroom detached residence combines timeless classical style with luxurious modern living. Perfectly positioned close to local amenities, the train station, and major carriageway links, this home offers the ideal blend of elegance, space, and convenience.

Upon entering, you are greeted by a grand entrance hallway featuring a stunning two-storey drop chandelier and classic detailing that sets the tone for the quality found throughout. Space is in abundance, with two additional reception rooms offering flexibility for formal dining, a study, or family relaxation.

The heart of the home is the magnificent open-plan kitchen, dining, and living area — a truly impressive space for entertaining and family life. The kitchen boasts a substantial central island, high-spec integrated appliances, and stylish finishes throughout. Bi-fold doors flood the space with natural light and open directly onto the beautifully landscaped rear garden, seamlessly connecting indoor and outdoor living. A separate utility room provides practicality and extra storage.

For leisure and entertainment, the property features an impressive indoor swimming pool with jet function. This also has changing and shower facilities. There is a terrific cinema room, perfect for family movie nights or entertaining guests. With raised flooring and surround sound.

Both the pool and kitchen open directly onto the large patio and garden, enhancing the home's exceptional flow and social appeal.

Outside, the landscaped rear garden is designed for year-round enjoyment, complete with a spacious patio seating area, fire pit, and an impressive outdoor kitchen- ideal for hosting gatherings. There is also a covered jacuzzi style hot tub and the lawn is artificial for ease of maintenance

A detached garden room offers further versatility, housing an additional bar, and games area, creating the perfect retreat for guests or family recreation. There is also another dedicated garden room, that houses the comprehensive gym. Both of these spaces have air conditioning.

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WANTED

for Georgian townhouse restoration in Yorkshire

Regency coal scuttle. Prefer brass, but steel also considered. (pictured)

Exceptionally good Regency sofa with fine carving or brass inlay.

Hogarth prints. Prefer lifetime or Boydell editions. Marriage a la Mode, Beer Street/Gin Lane, The Rake's Progress, Four Times of the Day, Lord Lovat etc.
Also Gillray and Rowlandson prints.

Wide reclaimed Georgian floorboards. Pine OK. 9 inch +. Approx 25m2 needed. (pictured)

Small sized Georgian marble or wood fire surrounds x 5, Circa 1800-ish.

Labelled or stamped furniture from 1760s to early Victorian. Morgan & Sanders, Robert Brown of Bristol, Wilkinson of Ludgate Hill, Seddon, John Durham and hundreds more. Also unsigned furniture with credible dealer or auction provenance eg Mallett, Partridge, Grosvenor House etc.

Chamber horse exercise chair. Domestic barrel organ (pictured)

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Rolex Princes. Rectangular steel/ silver or gold.

Rolex Oysters from 1920s to 1970s eg cushion shaped and octagonal. Oysterquartz 1980s. Gold and steel Rolex dress watches from 1950s to 1970s. Ladies Rolex watches also

Omegas. Marine 2 part 1930s models through to 1970s Seamasters, Constellations etc.

IWC. Civilian and military models.

Cartier pre 1980.

Breitling TopTime, Daytora, Navitimer etc

Jaeger LeCoultre. Reversos and circular models eg Geomatic, Geophysic, Memovox alarm etc.

Audemars Piguet, Vacheron Constantin and Patek-Philippe from 1940s to 1970s.

Tudor. Oysters or dress models.

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Jason Goodwin

Return to Crack-ow!

LONG ago, when I was young and fitfully employed, I volunteered to drive a Polish academic and his wife from London to Cracow in their Polski Fiat. The professor had been doing research at London University, had contracted appendicitis, had been operated on and was now fit to go home, but not fit enough to drive. He was fit enough, however, to sit beside me in the front and watch that my speed never went over 80km/h, beyond which, he had calculated, the car's fuel efficiency decreased. His wife was perfectly well, but didn't know how to drive. That did not stop her issuing driving instructions and criticisms into my ear from the back seat for the next four days.

I wanted the professor, at least, to resemble Leslie Howard in *Pimpernel Smith*. We were driving across the Iron Curtain. It was 1984, and martial law had been imposed in Poland. He was nothing like—both of them were dreadful bores—but as a young foreigner in a Polish car, I was something of an anomaly and we were able to take a route and stay in hostels that were forbidden to foreigners in those days. Principally, I remember the Dickensian gloom of East German cities: wet, cobbled streets, no lights, no shops, drab clothes and old men who had lost their legs in the war still getting about in curious Victorian contraptions with levers and turning handles. Eastern European towns and cities still awaited their post-war reconstruction. Yet Cracow was wonderful. Everything was covered in soot from the chimneys of a steelworks that the communists had built to replicate the conditions of Victorian England—and to punish the Cracowians for being too debonair and artistic (and proud and aristocratic) to embrace the Soviets. The largest medieval town square in Europe contained, as I recall, a single shop selling flimsy vinyl recordings of Chopin and the museums were wonderful. The Czartoryski Palace boasted 17th-century cavalry armour with feathered wings, a collection of Ottoman war tents and Leonardo's *Lady with an Ermine*, like the *Mona Lisa*'s more interesting sister. Never before had I ridden in a tram. I wandered through this *Emil and the Detectives* world and went up by train to Warsaw to meet an elegant writer who made a living translating hardboiled American detective stories into Polish, and who got me very, very drunk before he and his friends spooned me onto a train bound for Berlin and home.

> 'As a young foreigner in a Polish car, I was an anomaly and we could take forbidden routes'

I was still young when, six years after that, Kate and I arrived in Cracow on foot, walking from the Baltic to Istanbul, Turkey, across a continent freshly awoken from its Soviet slumber. It was May, everyone was buying flowers and somehow we were lodged like kings in Wawel Castle, the huge renaissance complex of palaces and cathedrals on a bluff above the Vistula. It was again wonderful, but I did not see the city again for another 20 years, when I arrived on a book tour by night train from Toruń. I had created the character of the fictitious Polish ambassador to the Ottoman court, based on the dashing Polish writer in Warsaw and on Prince Czartoryski, who had owned the Leonardo, and on my affection for the Poles.

I saw that picture again, last month. This time, I came from the airport. After a day limping around the old city, I went to see the surgeon who is going to replace my hip. Why Cracow, friends ask? It's cheaper than private, faster than the NHS and the clue, I tell them, is in the name. Really, however, it's for the memory of soot and the flowers and the feathered wings.

Next week **Jonathan Self**

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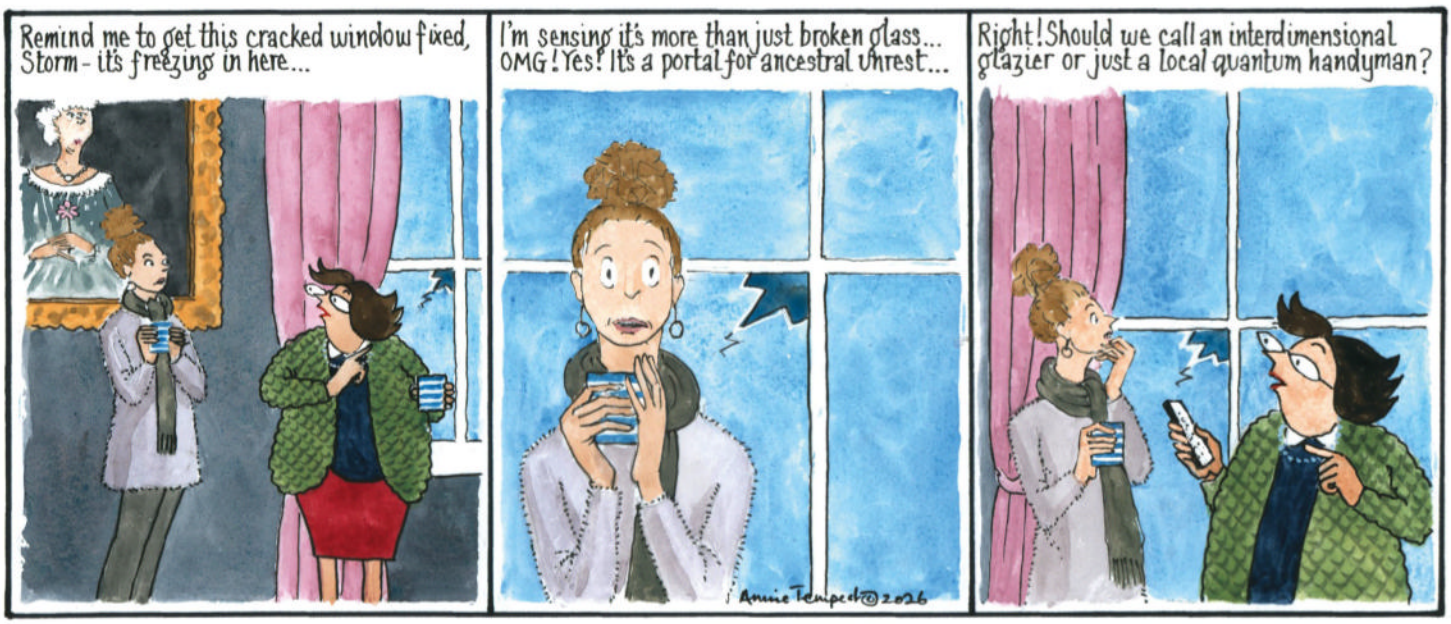
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Right! Should we call an interdimensional glazier or just a local quantum handyman?
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